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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

USING SELF-COMPASSIONATE FOCUSED WRITING  
PROMPTS BY MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN  
THE DANCE CLASSROOM: SHAPING HOW  
STUDENTS RESPOND TO THEIR ART  
AND VIEW THEMSELVES  
AS ARTISTS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts

Kathleen Noel Stein

College of Performing and Visual Arts  
School of Theatre Arts and Dance  
Dance Education

December 2019

This Thesis by: Kathleen Noel Stein

Entitled: *Using Self-compassionate Focused Writing Prompts by Middle School Students in the Dance Classroom: Shaping How Students Respond to their Art and View Themselves as Artists*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the College of Performing and Visual Arts, School of Theatre Arts and Dance, Program of Dance Education

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## ABSTRACT

Stein, Kathleen Noel. *Using Self-compassionate Focused Writing Prompts by Middle School Students in the Dance Classroom: Shaping How Students Respond to Their Art and View Themselves as Artists*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2019.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of using self-compassionate focused journal writing as a way to induce a more self-compassionate and less self-critical view in students of themselves and their art. This study examined the connection between the use of self-compassionate focused journal writing prompts and an increase in the levels of self-compassion that a student felt for him or herself. The purpose of this study was to provide students with the self-compassion tools, strategies, and skills necessary to deal with perceived setbacks in their choreographic process and performance. This quantitative and qualitative study was designed to answer five essential questions to determine the benefits of self-compassion. The research instruments used to gather data included the twenty-six-item Neff Self-Compassion Survey, a four-question survey of emotions, journal responses, and student interviews.

The study was based on research regarding the benefits of self-compassion in adults and adolescents. Self-compassion has been found to reduce stress and anxiety, and increase well-being and positive behaviors. As students navigate the challenges of adolescence, where there is the propensity for harsh self-criticism and negative social comparison, skills of self-compassion can provide adolescents with the tools to have a more positive outlook and self-view.

The findings from this study suggested that the self-compassion intervention of the Three Good Things journal prompt can benefit how students view themselves as developing artists. The findings also suggested that self-compassion can help students to appreciate their dance making as art and to recognize the quality of their creativity. The findings from this study led to recommendations for further research including investigating the connection between self-compassion and goal setting as well as the benefits of a variety of self-compassion interventions and not just effects of the Three Good Things journal prompt.

The limitations to the study included the small sample size of seventeen students, their age and maturity, and a lack of socio-economic diversity of the participants. Seventeen students took part in the semester length study; however, a larger sample size was needed in order to determine the effectiveness of the self-compassion intervention more thoroughly. Absences due to illness and other reasons hindered the ability for groups to devise their dances and for students to complete the Three Good Things responses consistently. Limitations also included second language learners in the study who were unfamiliar with the vocabulary of the research instruments, which may have hindered students from answering questions in a way that represented their ideas and feelings more precisely. An additional limitation was that students did not receive explicit instruction in self-compassion techniques.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Goal of Thesis**

Students enter the room excited to watch the video of their most recent performance. They gather in front of the screen and seat themselves in groups on the floor. The first dance begins and immediately the groans begin. “Oh no, I can’t watch. I look horrible.” Or, the favorite of many adolescents, “That’s so cringe-y.” Some students cover their eyes or bury their faces in their hands or their friend’s shoulder rather than watch their dance being projected on the screen. This is in sharp contrast to the emotions they experienced immediately after the show – the relief of it being over mixed with the adrenaline and excitement of performing. During the artists’ talk back to the audience, students will describe the weeks of work they spent developing a dance, from the inspiration to choreographing all the movements, to refining their movement choices to get it ready for performance. It is surprising now that they are back in the classroom to hear several students speak of the self-doubt, the regret, and the self-critical view of their work.

Dance is an art form that provides students with opportunities for self-expression, to communicate ideas to an audience; however, it is this same opportunity for self-expression that can leave many students in the middle school grades feeling vulnerable and open to judgment. “For a novice to engage in this process of discovery in front of his or her peers, under the evaluating eye of the instructor, and perhaps in front of a wall of

mirrors, the invitation to dance can seem daunting” (Demerson 99). This stage of development in adolescence is one where students are experiencing tremendous growth and changes physically, emotionally, and cognitively. Furthermore, students at this age are “typically acutely self-conscious of their changing bodies” (Demerson 101). Therefore, it is not surprising to hear students make negative comments to their peers and in their written reflections about their work. However, as Dr. Kristin Neff, one of the leading experts in the field of self-compassion stated in her book *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*, “There is a difference, however, between healthy self-deprecating humor and unhealthy self-disparagement. The first indicates that someone is self-confident enough to poke fun at him or herself. The second reveals deep-seated insecurities about personal worth and value” (Neff 29).

One of the goals of this study was to help students view themselves as dancers and their artistic work with self-compassion and loving-kindness rather than self-criticism and harshness (Leary et al. 887). Specifically, this study investigated the effects of using self-compassionate focused journal writing as a way to induce a more self-compassionate and less self-critical view in students of themselves and their art. This study examined the connection between the use of self-compassionate focused journal writing prompts and an increase in the levels of self-compassion that a student felt for him or herself.

The study also measured whether or not self-compassion can moderate the feelings of embarrassment, awkwardness, or disappointment that a student might experience after presenting his or her work to the class or in a performance to a wider audience of community members and reduce “. . . negative affect when confronted with their mistakes” (Leary et al. 901).

The essential questions posed by the researcher for this study were:

- Q1 To what extent can self-compassionate and other mindfulness practices benefit dance students?
- Q2 To what extent will the self-compassionate journal prompts effect the way students view their art and themselves as artists?
- Q3 To what extent can self-compassionate practices help students prepare for a dance performance?
- Q4 Which self-compassionate and mindfulness practices are most beneficial to students and best suited for the arts, in this case dance?
- Q5 What changes occurred in the students' level of self-compassion between the beginning of the class and its end?

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide students with the tools necessary to deal with perceived setbacks in their choreographic process and performance by teaching strategies of self-compassion and developing their skills of self-compassion. The aim was that through the journal writing exercises, students might recognize that there are highs and lows in choreographing, rehearsing, and performing a dance and develop a sense of a common humanity in response to this process.

As noted in a recent meta-analysis of psychological distress in adolescents, “Adolescence is a time of rapid biological, cognitive, and social change. These normative developmental changes may contribute to some mental health issues, such as elevated stress levels” (Marsh et al. 1011). Therefore, “There is increasing interest in how self-compassion can reduce negative affect associated with stressful life events” (Sbarra 262). Another purpose of this study was to develop students’ skills of self-compassion, teach strategies for noticing and accepting feeling uncomfortable while performing and viewing their work, and notice the mistakes they made and accept them. Through this study, the

expectation was that students can learn strategies to accept that making mistakes or not performing as well as one would like are part of the normal process of living. This study aimed to help students realize there are these highs and lows in choreographing, rehearsing, and performing a dance, and to use the skills of self-compassion to moderate the negative emotions that come along with feeling vulnerable in a performance situation.

In a study of the use of self-compassion when recovering from the distressing experience of a marital separation or divorce, it was discovered that:

In distressing situations, people who are high in self-compassion tend to experience negative affect without becoming overwhelmed or mired in negative thoughts about their experiences; they view themselves and their actions empathetically and are able to see both the highs and the lows of life as part of the human experience. (Sbarra 261-262)

The purpose of this study was to increase levels of self-compassion in students that could reduce feelings of negative thoughts or feelings when experiencing a distressing experience, such as performing, and reduce the feelings of stress, anxiety or depression that are common mental health issues experienced in adolescence (Marsh et al. 1011).

### **Significance of Study**

This study focused on developing an adolescent's sense of well-being during this important and challenging time of emotional, physical, and intellectual development. Through the development of self-compassion skills, a student dancer may begin to develop a better view and acceptance of their work, including what is presented during rehearsals to their classmates and peers as well as to a larger audience when performing on the stage. This study also included reporting changes in students' views when reflecting on their work after watching the performance video later in class.

The researcher's belief was that the skills of self-compassion could serve as a buffer for students when experiencing a distressing situation, such as performing for peers or an audience. Distressing situations, such as creating choreography or performing for an audience, are not only limited to the dance classroom, but are a part of the human experience. Equipping students with the tools necessary to navigate these negative experiences might also then be applied to negative experiences outside of the dance classroom and help them move away from patterns of responding with judgment. "Presumably, a person high in self-compassion sees his or her problems, weaknesses, and shortcomings accurately, yet reacts with kindness and compassion rather than with self-criticism and harshness" (Leary et al. 887).

Self-compassion could enable a student to grow and flourish from the experiences of creating a dance and performing for an audience that might feel uncomfortable, awkward, or embarrassing. A student might learn how to take what could be perceived as a negative experience, and be able to recognize the positive qualities or attributes. "Self-compassionate people more readily accept undesirable aspects of their character and behavior than people low in self-compassion without obsessing about them, becoming defensive, or feeling badly" (Leary et al. 901). The results of this study were important for all arts subjects where students are encouraged to take risks, to be vulnerable with their work when displaying artistic pieces that express their inner feelings or emotions. This study was also relevant to arts teachers who use journaling as a tool for students to reflect on and document their creative process.

There have been ample studies to measure the health benefits of mindfulness and self-compassion on adults. Many of those studies have concluded that there is a strong



correlation between positive health and well-being, both physically and mentally. According to the findings of Neff's research, when looking at the benefits of self-compassion in adults, "Research suggests that self-compassion is strongly related to psychological well-being, including increased happiness, optimism, personal initiative, and connectedness, as well as decreased anxiety, depression, neurotic perfectionism, and rumination" (Neff and McGehee 226). Similarly, other studies on mindfulness practices have demonstrated that these techniques had "... positive effects on emotional well-being in adults, and shows promise for similar results in research with youth" (Bluth and Blanton 1298). However, there is a limited body of research that examines whether or not the same health benefits of self-compassion would be found in adolescents.

The purpose of the 2009 study "Self-compassion and Psychological Resilience Among Adolescents and Young Adults" by Neff and Pittman McGehee was to "... determine if self-compassion would be associated with the same mental health benefits among adolescents that have been found in older populations" (226). Their quantitative study measured self-compassion using a number of research instruments or scales (229-230). The names of these research instruments or scales and what they measure can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

## Neff and McGehee Research Instruments and Their Content

Name of Instrument	Description
Self-Compassion Scale	Twenty-six item survey that measures Self-Kindness, Self-Judgement, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Over-Identification. One can examine the six subscales separately or as an overall score. (228-229)
Beck Depression Inventory	Twenty-one item questionnaire that assesses cognitive, affective, motivational, and somatic symptoms of depression.
Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory – Trait form	Twenty item anxiety questionnaire.
Social Connectedness Scale	Eight item scale that measures the degree of interpersonal closeness that individuals feel between themselves and other people, both friends and society.
Maternal subscale of the Family Messages Measure	Twelve item scale that assesses perceptions of supportive versus critical messages from one's mother regarding the self.
Index of Family Relations	Twenty-five item self-report scale that assesses family functioning.
The Relationship Questionnaire	Self-report measure designed to assess four distinct attachment styles: secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing.
Personal Uniqueness subscale of the New Personal Fable Scale	Thirteen item measure consists of items such as "No one has the same thoughts and feelings I have."

As a result of this study, the researchers found that, "As expected, self-compassion was associated with well-being among adolescents" and "Self-compassion evidenced a significant negative correlation with depression and anxiety and a significant positive correlation with feelings of social connectedness" (231).

Although the research tools used by Neff and McGehee are outside the scope of this study as they measured the factors that would predict current levels of self-compassion in an adolescent, such as dysfunction in a family or anxiety, their findings

supported the conclusion that self-compassion provided adolescents with numerous health benefits. However, the Neff and McGehee study did not introduce or teach adolescents methods of mindfulness or self-compassion exercises in order to measure if there was any change or growth in levels of self-compassion over time, or whether the research methods used in the study were effective. Therefore, the significance of this current study was that specific tools and strategies of self-compassion were introduced to adolescents and examined for their effectiveness in how a student views themselves as a dancer and an artist.

This current study was also based on a well-tested theory that self-compassion has a negative correlation to symptoms of depression and anxiety. At the inception of the current study, the relationship between self-compassion was not tested on adolescents in many studies. In the research on adolescents that did exist, the researchers noted that creating interventions to teach adolescents to be both more mindful and self-compassionate had the potential to lead to similar improvements in emotional health and well-being as found in adults (Bluth and Blanton 1307).

However, in the studies that have been conducted on adolescents, none measured the effects of specific interventions that were most successful in helping adolescents to develop higher levels of self-compassion. Neff stated that, “. . . efforts are currently underway to develop a self-compassion intervention for adolescents.” In one intervention that was pilot tested, high-school aged students attended a weekend retreat where they were introduced to the concept of self-compassion and provided exercises to help develop the feelings of compassion for themselves (Neff and McGehee 237).

Thus, in the current study, the hope was that specific interventions in the form of repeating three or four self-compassionate focused journal prompts would lead to a better understanding of which ones were most effective in improving a student's level of self-compassion. The hope was also that the students would gain the ability to view their work with less judgement and self-criticism.

Further significance of this study was whether there was the potential for implementing methods for improving adolescent self-compassion in school settings:

If self-compassion interventions do turn out to be successful, it may be that schools should start placing greater emphasis on the development of students' self-compassion to help them cope with the difficulties of growing up. This approach could help avoid the problems associated with self-esteem programs in the schools while still helping adolescents relate to themselves in a positive, productive manner. (Neff and McGehee 237)

This study was also significant because the researcher investigated the benefits of self-compassion in relation to an academic subject, which was dance. Investigations linking self-compassion to work in the arts did not previously exist. The results of this study were also of value to practitioners who use writing for reflective purposes in their classrooms.

Self-compassion promotes well-being (Sbarra 262) and resilience (266) in students. "Effective well-being promotion and early intervention in this stage of life [during adolescence] can prevent substantial personal distress and social cost" (Marsh et al. 1021). Teaching students to approach the creation of their dances with kindness and compassion, should allow students to feel worthy of presenting their work and feel worthy as a novice artist, which could have lasting effects beyond the dance classroom.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Self-Compassion**

*You can search the whole tenfold universe and not find a single being more worthy of love and compassion than the one seated here—yourself.*

Buddha

Self-compassion is the concept of taking the compassion that one often feels for others, a friend or fellow human being, and applying it to the self. Self-compassion is the ability to view one's feelings of suffering, discomfort or failure with a sense of warmth, connection, and concern (Neff and McGehee 226). The researcher discovered this sense of warmth and acceptance was also applied toward aspects of oneself or one's life that are disliked (Neff et al. 908). Whereas failure or dislike for one's life might elicit feelings of negativity or self-judgment, self-compassion involves desiring the same good health and well-being for oneself that one might wish for a friend.

#### *Three Core Components of Self-Compassion*

Neff, the leading researcher in the field of self-compassion, identified three distinct components of self-compassion. All three components are needed in order to achieve a fully compassionate stance toward oneself.

The first core component of self-compassion was self-kindness, which is the practice of providing oneself with the same comfort, kindness, and understanding one might offer to a friend (Neff, *Self-Compassion* 42). During times when one might

experience suffering or a perceived inadequacy, self-kindness is the practice of treating oneself with kindness and understanding (Neff et al. 908). Self-kindness enables a person to treat him or herself with care and understanding rather than harsh self-judgment (Neff and McGehee 226) and to extend warmth and non-judgmental understanding towards the self (Ferguson et al. 1264). Instead of ignoring or avoiding the feelings of pain or discomfort, self-kindness provides soothing and comfort. Self-kindness as a component of self-compassion enables a person to stop being harshly critical or judgmental of themselves. Self-kindness is the ability for an individual to actively respond to their own emotional pain or discomfort with warmth and also with the desire to alleviate the suffering (Marsh et al. 1012).

The second component of self-compassion requires recognizing common humanity and that pain and failure are unavoidable as part of the shared human experience (Neff et al. 908). In thinking about common humanity, one recognizes and acknowledges that imperfections or painful experiences are a part of the human experience. Recognizing common humanity allows one to remember that feelings of inadequacy, disappointment, shame, humiliation, or other painful emotions are shared by all (Neff, *Self-Compassion* 62). Understanding and accepting common humanity prevents feelings of isolation or that one's failures or painful experiences are unique to him or her alone. The ability to recognize and acknowledge that people are not perfect is an important component especially for the adolescent who often engages in social comparison with regards to personal and academic achievements.

The third component of self-compassion requires mindfulness, or being aware of painful experiences and acknowledging them rather than ignoring or exaggerating the

pain those events may cause. This component requires the ability to face painful thoughts and feelings rather than avoid them. Similar to self-kindness, mindfulness is the acceptance of painful emotions or experiences without judgment or recrimination. Mindfulness is also an active component of self-compassion in that an individual can respond to his or her emotions with warmth and kindness rather than reacting to the emotions or avoiding them (Neff, *Self-Compassion* 91).

### *Self-Compassion versus Self-Esteem*

Self-compassion, although similar in valuing the well-being of the self, is very distinct from self-esteem in the role it plays in developing well-being, prosocial behaviors, and resilience in response to negative emotions or experiences.

First, self-esteem is more associated with positive feelings about oneself, and feeling that one is valued by others (Leary et al. 887). Although self-esteem functions as a role in human development, the need for high self-esteem can contribute to problematic behaviors such as bullying, aggression, self-enhancement bias, and narcissism (Neff and McGehee 226). Furthermore, those with high self-esteem may also possess traits such as hubris, narcissism, and self-enhancing illusions that are not found in those with high self-compassion (Leary et al. 887). Self-esteem is also associated with social comparison, specifically downward social comparison whereby one can view others in a negative light in order to make a person feel better about themselves.

Self-compassion has similar psychological benefits as self-esteem, but has fewer of the negative drawbacks such as ego-defensiveness and narcissism (Neff and McGehee 226). A large study found that high self-compassion is correlated to lower social comparison, public self-consciousness and self-rumination than self-esteem (Gill et al.

2018). In contrast to self-esteem, self-compassion is an inclination or desire to care for oneself (Leary et al. 887).

*Health Benefits of Self-Compassion  
in Adults*

Several studies have been conducted in order to research the benefits of self-compassion in adults as well as in young adults who were college students. In these studies, the researchers investigated the benefits of self-compassion in a variety of settings as well as in relation to a variety of perceived failures such as poor academic performance, or personal failures and experiences such as a divorce. In several studies, the researchers also found that those with self-compassion are better equipped to face adversity and have a better response to negative life events.

One often cited study in the literature that described the benefits of self-compassion in adults, was conducted by Mark Leary et al. These authors researched the effects of self-compassion when responding to real-life events that were unpleasant (Leary et al. 888).

In their study, the researchers aimed to address questions that arose in previous studies about the promise of self-compassion as a tool that facilitates resilience and coping (Leary et al. 888). In this published study, the researchers documented five separate studies that investigated self-compassion in relationship to a variety of tasks. In these same five studies, participants were asked to report on unpleasant events in their everyday lives, respond to hypothetical scenarios, react to unpleasant feedback in a laboratory experiment, as well as deal with induced self-compassion where they performed an awkward and mildly embarrassing task (Leary et al. 888). Findings from these studies suggested that self-compassion acts as a buffer against the psychological



impact of negative occurrences and mitigates how one responds or reacts to positive and negative events (Leary et al. 896).

In the first three studies included in the above research, in which participants reported on unpleasant experiences, responded to hypothetical scenarios, and reacted to feedback in a laboratory, the researchers discovered “. . . that self-compassionate people react with greater equanimity to difficult situations than people who are lower in self-compassion” (Leary et al. 896). In addition, the fifth study that was included in the research mentioned above where self-compassion was induced, was successful in proving that self-compassion induction was effective for people who were lower in self-compassion (Leary et al. 899).

Whereas the second study in the above research looked at the participant’s reactions to hypothetical events of loss, failure, or humiliation, in the fifth study, participants were asked to recall an actual failure, rejection, or loss that produced negative feelings or caused them to feel bad about themselves. In this fifth study, writing prompts were used to induce self-compassion so that participants reflected on the negative event in ways that were connected to the three core components of self-compassion described earlier: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

The result of the fifth study was that self-compassion induction was especially beneficial for those who were lower in self-compassion as noted by their results on the Self-Compassion Scale, a twenty-six-item survey that measured a person’s levels of self-compassion in each of the three component areas. Similar to the fifth study, the Leary et al. study predicted that inducing self-compassion would result in participants responding in more positive ways.

Overall, the self-compassion researchers found that when encountering potentially humiliating or emotionally uncomfortable situations, receiving negative feedback, or remembering past negative life events, those with self-compassion were able to respond with more emotional balance than those with high self-esteem (Neff et. al 909). Thus, those who are self-compassionate are better equipped to accept the aspects of their character, their foibles and fallibilities, or the imperfections of their behavior without obsessing, becoming defensive, or having a negative self-view (Leary et al. 901).

The findings from Leary et al. that self-compassion is an important construct to mitigate how one responds to negative or upsetting events that involve failure, rejection, and embarrassment are particularly important for the middle school adolescent who is being asked to perform and take the risk of opening themselves up to the potential of this type of failure. Self-compassion has the potential to ameliorate the tendency to respond with negativity and self-criticism and instead enable adolescents to react with the same equanimity and acceptance as the adult participants in the Leary et al. study.

In another study, the researchers focused on the important role that self-compassion plays in helping adults to cope with difficult situations. Researcher David Sbarra studied the effects of self-compassion during a highly stressful experience in one's life, particularly when experiencing a divorce. One could argue that performing for peers or a larger audience of school community members is a highly stressful experience, especially for an adolescent who is already hyper aware of the level of his or her social or academic achievements.

Similar to the research conducted by Leary et al., Sbarra studied responses to the three core components of self-compassion. In Sbarra's study, participants mentally

recalled a detailed image of their former partner for thirty seconds and then recorded a four-minute stream of consciousness monologue of their thoughts regarding their separation or divorce experience. Their recordings were evaluated for the degree to which they exhibited self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Participants then returned at intervals of three, six and nine months for follow-up assessments where they took part in several self-report surveys such as Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale and the Life Orientation Test-Revised (Sbarra 263). In this study, the researcher found that participants who had higher levels of self-compassion reported less emotional distress as a result of the divorce (Sbarra 264). Sbarra's study determined that those with higher levels of self-compassion continued to experience less divorce related distress even up to nine months after the initial audio recording created by the participants (Sbarra 266).

Similar to the findings of Leary et al., Sbarra determined that self-compassion acts as a buffer during distressing or challenging life experiences. Those with the trait of self-compassion are less likely to ruminate or be self-deprecating about the negative experience and are also less likely to be mired in feelings of isolation or loneliness (Sbarra 267).

The above studies pointed to a level of perseverance and resilience found in adults with self-compassion when faced with distressing situations. With the belief that self-compassion is teachable, (Sbarra 266) one can apply these same findings to adolescents who are just developing these same life skills of perseverance and resilience which are important to their growth as well-adjusted individuals.

Another important finding about the benefits of self-compassion that was shared in the studies conducted by Leary et al. and the one done by Sbarra was the importance of

noticing and accepting failures, discomfort, awkwardness or other negative emotions associated with an event.

Most of the research that has been conducted on self-compassion, has focused on its negative association with psychopathology (Neff et. al 909). However, in a 2006 study conducted by Neff and others, the researchers focused on the connection between positive psychological benefits and self-compassion.

The outcome of the above study revealed several important findings related to the benefits of self-compassion and positive psychological behaviors in adults. These researchers found a positive correlation between self-compassion and features of positive mental health, such as happiness, optimism, and a negative correlation to negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and rumination (Neff et al. 912). Furthermore, the study found that individuals who are more self-compassionate experienced significantly more positive and less negative moods.

In the Neff et al. study, the researchers also discovered connections between self-compassion and curiosity and exploration. Based on this research, Neff suggested that there is a correlation between being open and accepting of oneself and being open to new experiences and the world in general (Neff et al. 913). Other benefits of self-compassion were noted from the outcome of this study, including those who were self-compassionate had significantly lower levels of neuroticism or the state of being neurotic (913).

Overall, from the above study, the researchers concluded that self-compassion not only reduces psychopathic behaviors such as depression, anxiety, and rumination, but also predicts more positive psychological strengths and well-being such as wisdom, happiness, and optimism (914).

Other studies have also reported benefits of self-compassion in adult participants. Through the use of two separate experiments, researchers in another study examined the connection between self-affirmation and increased self-compassion (Lindsay and Creswell). In the second of the above experiments, participants were asked to evaluate a video of themselves or of someone else they were told was a fellow participant, but was really a researcher. The point was that some might deem this situation mildly embarrassing. Participants were then asked to use a seven-point Likert scale to measure how they felt while watching the video, in relation to feeling adjectives such as happy, sad, proud, or embarrassed.

In assessing the results of the two experiments in the Lindsay and Creswell study, the researchers found that self-affirmation does increase feelings of self-compassion which in turn fosters more prosocial behaviors (7). The significance of this research was that researchers discovered a cause and effect cycle whereby self-affirmation builds self-compassion, which then leads to more prosocial and helping behaviors. One could argue that developing self-compassion and pro-social behaviors in adolescents is important at this time in their development when their focus tends to be more inward and self-serving.

In addition to the studies described above, other studies have proven the benefits of self-compassion for adults. Benefits include lower levels of anxiety or other negative behaviors, ability to function better in romantic relationships (Breines and Chen 1134), decreased stress, reduced anxiety when considering one's greatest weakness, intrinsic interest in learning and beneficial coping strategies after failing an exam (Neff et al. 909).

Findings from prior studies have also shown that having self-compassion can mitigate the negative response to a dieting failure among participants prone to disordered

eating behaviors (Breines and Chen 1134). Other studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between self-compassion and the intrinsic motivation to exercise, as well as reducing the need to smoke (Breines and Chen 1134).

In additional studies, researchers found a physical link between feelings of compassion for oneself and others and brain activity in the left prefrontal cortex, a region associated with joy and optimism (Neff et al. 912). Moreover, self-compassion has been related to personal initiative, or the active involvement of making changes in one's life in order to have a more productive and fulfilling life (913). Neff concluded that those who are self-compassionate are better able to make positive changes in their lives because they avoid self-recrimination or other forms of harsh self-criticism (913).

#### *Self-Compassion and Motivation*

In considering the role of self-compassion as beneficial to one's mental and emotional well-being, there is a concern that self-compassion will lead to complacency and lack of motivation. Some researchers have questioned whether or not those with high self-compassion will be less motivated or proactive when it comes to improving aspects of one's life. However, according to Neff, self-compassion does not lead to passivity, but rather it contributes to the desire for health and well-being for oneself which in turn leads to more motivation when trying to improve one's situation or life circumstances (Neff et al. 913).

Several studies have examined the ways in which self-compassion influences positive behaviors and well-being, especially with regard to motivation. One such study, which included four separate experiments, was conducted by Juliana Breines and Serena Chen. In this study, the researchers investigated the connection between the motivation

for self-improvement and self-compassion. In the self-compassion component of this study, participants were asked to write for three minutes using a compassionate and understanding perspective while reflecting on a personal weakness that made them feel bad about themselves. They were also given an opportunity to reflect on the weakness and whether or not it was something that could be changed. In the self-compassionate condition of this study, those who took a self-compassionate approach toward their weakness, viewed the weakness as something changeable as opposed to other participants who were not involved in the self-compassionate condition of the experiment.

A second experiment used a compassionate and understanding point of view to test the effects of self-compassion in participants who reflected on a transgression. In this study, the researchers found the benefits of self-compassion could be seen because the participants in this condition were more motivated to make amends and also avoid making a similar transgression again in the future (1137).

Overall, Breines and Chen concluded that those with higher levels of self-compassion not only viewed their personal weaknesses with more acceptance, but also saw their weaknesses as something that was adaptable and changeable. These same participants had higher levels of motivation when improving those weaknesses. Furthermore, these same researchers found that approaching failure with self-compassion increased effort and performance over time (1140).

The outcome of Breines and Chen's study suggested that this same function of self-compassion is a key component in increasing motivation and promoting self-improvement across various domains (1140). This study pointed specifically to education as a place where self-compassion could be used to help students respond to failures or

setbacks without inflicting harsh self-criticism, defensive self-enhancement or denial on themselves. These findings have implications for this thesis study as students could benefit from using self-compassionate coping skills to avoid responding to setbacks with self-deprecation or other self-critical behaviors.

Another study reported similar benefits for self-compassion as those found in the Breines and Chen study. Whereas Breines and Chen researched the levels of self-compassion in participants who focused on a personal weakness or transgression, in a study conducted by Ferguson et al., the researchers investigated the effects of self-compassion in a specific domain or context, which was sports. The Ferguson et al. study examined the relationship between self-compassion and eudaimonic well-being in sport. An eudaimonic state refers to being happy, healthy, and satisfied.

In the above study, Ferguson et al. found that college-aged female athletes were apprehensive about treating themselves with self-compassion because they feared it would lead to passivity and that their reliance on harsh self-criticism was seen as a necessary aspect of being successful in their sport (1265). To this end, other researchers found that those who were self-critical were fearful of or found it difficult to treat themselves with compassion (1265). Ferguson et al. pointed out that athletes who fear, avoid, or resist the use of self-compassion could be doing themselves a disservice which can prevent them from reaching their full potential (1276). The reliance on self-criticism as a means of motivation demonstrated by these athletes can also be applied to the context of dancers who make similar performance demands on their bodies.

Three general findings were reported in the above study. First, the researchers determined that athletes who were self-compassionate possessed specific positive



behaviors such as autonomy, derived more meaning and drive from their particular sport, and also had a greater appreciation for their body (1276). Other benefits for athletes possessing high levels of self-compassion were that they exhibited more constructive character traits, such as positivity, perseverance, and responsibility, when faced with a difficult situation in their sport. In contrast, athletes who reported being fearful of being self-compassionate, were found to have a lower eudaimonic well-being.

Similar to previous studies, Ferguson et al. found that when athletes with higher levels of self-compassion experienced emotionally difficult situations when playing their particular sport, they had fewer negative reactions, such as rumination, passivity, and self-criticism. This study further concluded that young athletes who have a kinder or self-compassionate approach, might have more resources for facing difficult experiences in their sport, thereby being better able to reach their potential (1276).

Overall, the researchers concluded that their findings regarding the benefits of self-compassion were relevant to the psychological well-being of young female athletes who often encounter immense physical, mental, and emotional challenges in their sport, including pressure from evaluations that are based on their performance and appearance (1264). Similar to these athletes, dancers also face challenges and evaluations made by the self and others with regards to ability, creativity, and appearance. Given that both athletes and dancers are familiar with challenging performance situations, the findings about the benefits of self-compassion in overcoming negative emotions in athletes could be applied to adolescent performers in a dance or performing arts program.

## **Self-Compassion and Adolescents**

Peer pressure, academic pressures, relationships with peers and family, and body image issues, are just a few of the concerns many young teens and adolescents encounter today in their daily lives. Some of the issues and pressures that adolescents face can lead to serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and isolation.

### *Psychological Stress and Mental Health Issues Facing Adolescents*

In their study, “Self-Compassion and Psychological Resilience Among Adolescents and Young Adults,” Neff and McGehee found that the emotional difficulties experienced in the teen years often arise from being overly concerned with self-evaluation (225). “The intense pressures faced by most adolescents, such as stress over academic performance, the need to be popular and “fit in” with the right peer crowd, body image, concerns with sexual attractiveness, and so on, means that the self-evaluations by teens are often unfavorable” (Neff and McGehee 225). The researchers observed that the negative views teens have of themselves lead to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and attempted suicide (225). Other mental health issues that adolescents experience during this stage are stress, anxiety, and depression (Marsh et al. 1011).

Several studies have noted the intense pressures and experiences that adolescents face during this time of emotional, academic, and social growth. For example, researchers Karen Bluth and Priscilla W. Blanton noted in their study that adolescence is particularly challenging because they are prone to self-judgment and questioning their self-worth (1300). In a study of teens in Northern Italy who were transitioning to high school, other researchers found that this time of transition is particularly challenging for a student’s

self-concept. The researchers also noted decreases in academic self-concept, which is the perception a student has of his or her academic abilities based on experiences and the interpretation of the academic and school environment (Facchin et al. 133).

### *Issues Specific to the Dance Classroom*

Dance is an art that is about achieving a perfect line, shape, or extension and encourages perfection --a perfection that is unattainable to most students. In her study of undergraduate beginning dance students, Betsy Cooper noted:

In an art form where many students strive for perfection and an ideal body and crave positive feedback for a sense of self-worth, it is all too common to hear students speak in a self-denigrating tone – focusing and commenting on what is wrong with their bodies and their dancing. Rarely do they articulate what they do well or discuss how or what they have learned or improved on. (5)

Many of the issues that adolescents face in their day-to-day lives can be exacerbated by the pursuit of perfection in dance, especially when surrounded by mirrors that reflect back what they perceive to be mistakes. Using positive approaches, such as self-compassionate writing, in the dance classroom can help students to develop the skills of self-regulation, and manage the stress they might feel as they face the challenges of learning dance and developing themselves as dancers and artists.

### *Self-Criticism and Motivation*

The purpose of this study was to investigate how self-compassionate interventions or teaching tools of self-compassion can buffer negative self-talk or harsh self-criticism in adolescents. As dancers, athletes, or students work toward a goal, they may use self-criticism as a tool for motivation in reaching their goals. However, self-criticism can in fact hinder one from achieving his or her goals. A self-critic becomes focused on

avoiding feelings of failure, loss, guilt, or the inability to live up to standards instead of on effective means to achieve the goal (Powers et al. 279).

In a study of weight-related goals among college women, self-criticism was linked with a decrease in progress toward achieving goals and an increase in procrastination and rumination about failures (279). Self-critics may also be more emotionally reactive to perceived failure (280). Therefore, if students perceive their performance or mistakes as a failure, the tendency for harsh self-criticism or judgment could sabotage their ability to actually achieve their goals. This is especially true for adolescents who are in a continual process of self-evaluation and social comparison. Skills of self-compassion have the potential to buffer adolescents from negative effects associated with self-criticism as they are developing their own goal setting skills in a variety of areas both personal and academic.

In a study of 55 college varsity athletes and 72 high performing musicians, with a mean age range of 20 to 21 years old, researchers found that self-critics were more emotionally reactive to perceived failure. They found that those who were high in self-criticism were hypersensitive to potential judgment and failure and hyper-focused on avoiding failure (Powers et al. 282). Self-critics are less able to handle the emotions caused by setbacks or failures that are part of common life experience. Researchers concluded that the perception of failure can have substantial negative impacts on emotional well-being and can cause further deterioration of one's affective state (282).

The self-critic becomes caught in a spiral of perceived failure with negative affect which in turn causes decreased goal attainment, further perpetuating the self-critic's feelings of failure or guilt. The diminished affective state can lead to further

psychological issues such as anxiety and depression. Although the Powers et al. study focused on young adults, the findings establish the importance of avoiding the destructive behaviors of self-criticism, particularly for vulnerable adolescent populations:

When adolescents cannot integrate their own experiences with those of others, they may be even harder on themselves, feel more isolated in their failures, and over-dramatize their personal problems. This in turn is likely to exacerbate feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation. (Neff and McGehee 228)

The tools of self-compassion can enable adolescents to adapt to life's challenges and respond to setbacks appropriately.

*Research on Adolescents  
and Health Benefits of  
Self-compassion*

The limited research that has been conducted using adolescent populations has found similar results to the findings of studies conducted on adult populations. One of the studies included in a meta-analysis of nineteen self-compassion studies with adolescent participants. In this study, the researchers found that participants with low self-compassion was often a prediction of elevated depressive symptoms, psychological distress, substance abuse, and serious suicide attempts (Marsh et al. 1012). In contrast, another study found that higher levels of self-compassion predicted lower levels of psychopathology such as depression, post-traumatic stress, panic, and suicidality in a sample of adolescents following a traumatic event (Marsh et al. 1011).

Furthermore, as in the studies conducted with adult populations, a study of disadvantaged youths found that self-compassion acted as a buffer against negative life experiences and poor psychological outcomes (Marsh et al. 1012). In another study of adolescents, researchers found that self-compassion was a key regulatory process in preventing depressive symptoms (Marsh et al. 1012). In a second study, it was discovered

that chronic academic stress and negative affect were buffered in adolescents who were higher in self-compassion (Marsh et al. 1013). These adolescent studies indicated there are benefits of self-compassion practices in adolescent populations.

Although the need for self-compassion in adolescent populations has been identified, few studies have focused on the explicit teaching of self-compassion skills or interventions. In studies where self-compassion was explicitly taught, increased self-compassion was associated with reductions in rumination and depressive symptoms, and increases in positive affect and life satisfaction (Marsh et al. 1013). In a meta-analysis of adolescents and self-compassion, researchers who conducted a small-scale eight-week study found that those participants who were taught self-compassion interventions, displayed a significant reduction in the perceived stress. Those conducting this study also found significant increases in resilience, gratitude, and curiosity (Marsh et al. 1021).

In a separate study of a six-week mindfulness program for non-clinical adolescents, participants reported increases in their levels of self-compassion and life satisfaction and significantly lower levels of depression than participants in a control group. In this study, mindfulness and self-compassion were also connected to lower levels of anxiety, depression, perceived stress, and low mood in adolescents who received self-compassion interventions. The hypothesis of the meta-analysis was confirmed that the benefits of self-compassion found in adults are the same for adolescents. The significance of this researcher's study is that self-compassionate interventions will reduce anxiety and increase resilience, which is beneficial for novice dancers and performers.

The findings from the above studies included in the meta-analysis were also corroborated by the Neff and McGehee study "Self-compassion Among Adolescents and

Young Adults.” In addition, Neff and McGehee conducted a quantitative study of 235 adolescents from a large city in the southwest of the United States. Participants were given eight separate scales, inventories or questionnaires. The list of the research instruments used in this study can be found in Table 1. The researchers found that self-compassion was associated with well-being among adolescents. In the outcome of this latter study, “Self-compassion evidenced a significant negative correlation with depression and anxiety and a significant positive correlation with feelings of social connectedness” (231).

The findings of the negative correlation between self-compassion, depression, and anxiety are additional benefits for adolescents who develop skills of self-compassion. The findings about adolescents and self-compassion interventions are significant because self-compassion can be enhanced through practice. The self-compassion techniques that an adolescent learns can help him or her to overcome negative experiences, depressive symptoms or psychological distress (Neff and McGehee 236).

Another study in the field of self-compassion and adolescents, provided evidence of positive benefits for self-compassion. In a study of 316 adolescents in the United Kingdom, researchers found that “. . . higher self-compassion may support adolescents to be less fearful of evaluations and less avoidant, in turn leading to reduced symptoms of social anxiety” (Gill et al. 169). These findings are significant for adolescents in this current study who perform before large audiences and who are evaluated by their peers and the researcher who is also the teacher assigning the final grade.

The aim of the current study was to provide students with strategies for approaching their work with less self-criticism and negative self-talk. These skills can have a lasting impact on the health and well-being of adolescents:

Being more attentive, aware, and accepting of that which one is facing in the moment can allow adolescents to become kinder and less critical of themselves. It is conceivable that when adolescents become increasingly aware of their thoughts, they can recognize the degree to which these thoughts are self-critical and harmful, and therefore take steps to treat themselves with greater kindness. (Bluth and Blanton 1305-1306)

### **Benefits of Writing**

Several studies have investigated the benefits of writing and the impact of writing on health and psychological well-being. Most of the literature that exists on the benefits of writing focuses on writing about traumatic or negative events. In those studies, participants experienced benefits as a result of processing, organizing, integrating, and analyzing events and gaining insight into their feelings (King 2001; Lyubomirsky et al. 2006). Researchers also found that writing about stressful or traumatic events lead to fewer physical illnesses over time (King 799).

Although much of the research has focused on writing about negative experiences, some studies have attempted to measure the health benefits of writing about positive events, or prompts that focus on the positive aspects of a negative or traumatic event without increasing intense negative emotions.

In a study of 81 psychology students ages 18-42 at Southern Methodist University, participants wrote for twenty minutes each day over four consecutive days. Researcher Laura King attempted to examine whether writing about a self-regulatory topic that was not too intensely emotional might lead to the physical health benefits of writing (798). Participants were divided into four groups and asked to write about one of



four topics: their best possible selves in the future, their most traumatic life experiences, both of these, or a control topic (King 800). The group that wrote about their best possible future self were instructed to imagine themselves achieving their goals in the future and what this would look like.

King found several health benefits as a result of writing about a best possible self (BPS) in the future, such as increased self-regulation, responding appropriately to setbacks, and seeing failure as part of the normal scheme of life. By writing about their BPS, participants were able to integrate their life experiences into a narrative that helped them to discover their true selves (806). In her study, King found that writing about a BPS provided health benefits without the emotional costs of writing about a traumatic event (804). King concluded that those who wrote about a BPS were more positive, optimistic, less emotional and experienced an increased net positive mood (804). King synthesized her findings about the benefits of writing about positive topics:

The act of writing down our deepest thoughts and feelings is key to the benefits of writing. However, and importantly, the contents of our deepest thoughts and feelings need not be traumatic or negative. Quite the contrary, examining the most hopeful aspects of our lives through writing – our best imagined futures.... might also bestow on us the benefits of writing that have been long assumed to be tied only to our traumatic histories.” (806)

These findings are important for adolescents who may be susceptible to or experiencing anxiety, depression, or other negative affective states. Therefore, similar to participants in the King study who wrote about their BPS, for this current study it was important for participants to focus on positive aspects of dance or the creative process, rather than recalling negative events or focusing on the negative or frustrating aspects of devising and performing a dance. By using self-compassion journal prompts in this study,

the students might avoid recalling or conjuring negative or stressful thoughts or experiences.

King's findings about participants who switched topics during the four consecutive days are also relevant to the current study. In her study, King found that requiring participants to change topics in the middle of the study interrupted the flow of the participants' writing (806). King also cited a previous study completed in 2000 in which she learned that participants who changed writing topics demonstrated lower health benefits than participants who wrote about one topic (800). To avoid the disruption to the flow of students' writing, the researcher of the current study asked participants to write in response to the same journal prompt repeated over the course of the study. The findings about this focus will be examined in the Discussion chapter.

#### *Benefits of Writing for Adolescents*

Similar to the studies of self-compassion, the majority of the literature on the benefits of writing focuses on adult populations. However, there are some studies in which the researchers focused on studying the health benefits of writing for adolescents.

In a 2007 meta-analysis of existing studies on the benefits of expressive writing interventions with adolescents, researchers found that there were positive mental health benefits and improvements to the subjects' psychological well-being. One study involved having the participants write about their thoughts and feelings based on a negative or traumatic event. The researchers of that study found that there were positive mental health benefits and improvements to psychological well-being including reductions in levels of anxiety, depression, and aggressive behaviors (Doucet et al. 114).

However, in other studies which were part of the above meta-analysis, it was discovered that when the expressive writing was focused on stressful situations, it was detrimental to adolescents and actually increased anxiety and depressive symptoms (Doucet et al. 114). Given these finding about the potential harm caused by asking adolescents to recount negative events, it was essential for the current study that participants be asked to write about positive features of their dance and dance making process instead of focusing on the potential trauma or stress caused by performing.

*Focusing on the Positive  
with Adolescents*

In a 2013 study comparing the effects of benefit-focused writing and expressive writing by adolescents, the researchers were interested in investigating the potential health outcomes of benefit-focused writing with regard to an adolescent's transition to high school. In this study, 220 boys from six high schools in Northern Italy were assigned to one of three conditions: benefit-focused writing, expressive writing, and factual writing. For the benefit-focused writing group, rather than writing about mistakes or negative events, participants focused on the benefits or positive outcomes of those events. Researchers measured improvement using the Academic Self-Concept Scale, which assesses an adolescent's evaluation of school-related issues, such as academic performance (Facchin et al. 135). Participants in all three conditions wrote during three fifteen-minute sessions over three consecutive days.

In the above study, researchers found that benefit-focused versus standard expressive writing resulted in significantly higher self-concept scores compared with those who were in the expressive writing and factual writing groups (137). Furthermore, those with a low academic self-concept at the start of the study experienced more benefits

from benefit-focused writing compared with those in the expressive writing condition (138). Thus, focusing on the benefits of transitioning to high school was beneficial to male adolescents. Similar to the King study, researchers also determined that adolescents need more than three days of consecutive writing and benefit from “booster” writing sessions, where they write periodically over a longer period of time.

### *Benefits of Writing in the Dance Class*

Writing, and specifically reflective writing is often a task that is thought to be reserved for language arts or other academic classes. However, there are several benefits to incorporating writing in the dance class.

In a study of twenty-nine undergraduate students in an advanced beginning ballet class, participants completed four reflective writing assignments over the course of a ten-week quarter that culminated in a written portfolio submitted at the end of the course for a final grade. These writing assignments were completed outside of instructional class time. The first writing assignment was focused on goal setting. The third writing assignment was a written reflection of the goals established in the first writing assignment and the progress students had made toward achieving them.

From a qualitative analysis of student writing, the researcher Betsy Cooper concluded that there were several benefits to incorporating writing in the dance class. She found that students were not only more engaged in the learning process and progress, but they also demonstrated greater self-confidence as learners and dancers, developed analytical skills, demonstrated a growth mind-set, and were more perceptive about their progress or misunderstandings that were hindering their progress or having a negative impact on their learning or self-image (10). Further benefits included the ability of the

instructor to use the reflections as a way to enhance learning in the class by using these discoveries to tailor lessons and course design.

Several of Cooper's findings are relevant to the current study. For example, Cooper found that students deepened their artistic learning and were able to examine their creative process through their writing. Cooper also concluded that through their writing participants began to view their learning in dance as an evolving process and they also acquired patience and acceptance of their ability and of their work, rather than being complacent, frustrated or self-critical as they worked toward achieving their goals (8). Overall, Cooper learned that, ". . . reflective writing promotes engaged and co-participatory learning, fosters a metacognitive approach to dance training and spurs a positive shift in students' perceptions of themselves as dancers and learners" (4).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the methods used for setting up the research, the instruments used for gathering data, and the methods used for analyzing the data.

#### **Preparation for Study**

Prior to beginning the research study and gathering of data, the researcher first obtained permission from the Internal Review Board (IRB) of the University of Northern Colorado. A narrative document was submitted to IRB that included a description of the purpose; research methods; data collection procedures; instruments used for data collection; data analysis and handling procedures; risks, discomforts and benefits of the study; costs and compensations; and grant information if applicable. Copies of the research instruments that would be used, consent forms for parents, and assent forms for students were submitted with the application. A letter of support from the principal at the researcher's school was obtained and submitted to IRB as well. The documents that were submitted as part of the IRB application can be found in Appendix A.

#### **Research Participants and Site**

The study took place at a private, not-for-profit school located in Europe. The school was founded in the 1950's and currently serves 980 students in grades pre-K through twelve with over fifty nationalities represented throughout the student body. The

language of instruction is English. The school is a 1:1 laptop school with students receiving MacBook computers in grade five.

Dance is offered at the school as a semester length arts course for the middle school students. Dance is taught using an inquiry-based approach that encourages artistic development and learning. No prior dance or arts experience is necessary to participate in an arts course and there is no requirement for previous formal training. The dance course was first offered at the school for students in grades six to eight in the fall of 2016. In the fall of 2017, the dance program was expanded to include students in grades nine and ten. This means currently dance is offered to students in grades six through ten at the school. All classes included in this study were held in the researcher's dance studio, with the exception of the final performances which were held in the school's main theatre. Each of the classes that participated in the study met on a nine-block rotating schedule where classes meet two to three times per week for seventy-five minutes per class. The length of the study was one semester.

The participants in this study were students in grades seven and eight who were enrolled in the spring 2019 semester of Dance 7/8 dance classes. The two grade levels were combined in each class. There were eight students in Class A, which was comprised of six girls and two boys. In the second class, Class B, there were thirteen boys and six girls.

Assent forms for students and consent forms for parents were distributed in each class and returned when completed to the researcher. Participation in the study was optional. Although all twenty-seven students participated in all the movement activities, wrote journal responses, and danced in the final performances, only eighteen students

returned signed parent consent forms. The data from one of the students who submitted a parent consent form was eliminated from the study because of incomplete responses on the surveys. The data from seventeen students in total was used for this study. The researcher combined the data from both classes for the review and analysis.

### **Focus of Student Choreography**

Within each semester of dance, the researcher covers one to two main units of study that each culminate in a performance. For both classes, the first unit of study examined the similarities between dance and martial arts with a focus on the elements of dance, specifically body, energy, space, and time. Students devised their dances by creating movements that were inspired by the martial movements they learned in class. Learning activities throughout the unit focused on the similarities in the use of body, energy, space, and time in the movements of martial arts and dance. Two martial arts practitioners were guest artists who conducted one-day workshops with students in both classes. Throughout this unit, the students examined specific forms of martial arts, such as Aikido, Tae Kwan Do, and Karate.

The summative assessment for this unit was to work in small groups to devise an original dance piece that was inspired by the martial arts movements the students had experienced and researched. This work needed to include martial arts inspired movements as well as a clear artistic intention which could be communicated to the audience. For example, students devised dance pieces that demonstrated the conflicting emotions a teen experiences and the tension between positive and negative thoughts and emotions. The task sheet for creating the summative choreographic assignment can be found in Appendix C.



*Class A*

Due to the smaller class size of Class A, the students unanimously voted to create their martial arts-based dance piece as an entire class instead of working in small groups or pairs. Their piece was performed at the middle school talent show in May before an audience of middle school students in grades six to eight, teachers, and administrators. Parents of the performers were also invited to attend.

*Class B*

The nineteen students in Class B were divided into four groups. The largest group was comprised of the six female students in the class. The other all-male groups included two groups of four and one group of five students. These dances were performed before an invited audience of students in Kindergarten and grade four, their teachers and teaching assistants. Parents of the students performing were also invited to attend. The performances for both classes were video-taped and viewed afterward by each entire class during their next class meeting.

**Research Design and Instrumentation**

The data produced from the study was evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Over the course of the study, several research instruments were used to answer the essential questions of the study. All participants were given a numerical code to protect their confidentiality. These codes were used to identify all student responses. The dates that the research instruments were administered to each class can be seen in Table 2.

### *Pre-Post Surveys*

The instruments included two pre- and two post-surveys. The first survey, which was administered at the start and at the end of the study, was comprised of the twenty-six item Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) designed by Neff. The SCS calculates scores in six sub-scales of self-compassion: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, over identification, and mindfulness. It was also possible to calculate a score for a participant's overall level of self-compassion based on the sub-scale scores. Participants completed the SCS on-line. A copy of the SCS can be found in Appendix B.

The second survey was Instrument #4, a survey that was designed by the researcher. This research instrument was administered at the beginning and end of the study. In the first question on this survey, the researcher asked participants to rank their feelings about performing before peers or other audience members. There were four questions on this survey. Participants ranked their experience using a Likert scale of 1-5: not at all (1), slightly (2), moderately (3), very (4), and extremely (5).

Participants responded to a second question on the above survey in which they were asked whether watching a video of their performance was an unpleasant or stressful experience. The same Likert scale was used to assess the students' responses to this question.

For the third question on this same survey, the researcher asked participants to use the same 1-5 Likert scale to rank to what extent they experienced twenty different emotions, such as embarrassed, tense, or nervous when performing, presenting work to their peers, or how they might feel if they made a mistake when performing.

Participants responded to the fourth and final question on the survey in which they were asked to imagine themselves in a scenario where they made a mistake while performing on stage. Using the 1-5 Likert scale, participants ranked their reactions to the imaginary situation. Students used the 1-5 Likert scale to rank the frequency with which they experienced thoughts such as, “This is awful!” or “In the long run, this really doesn’t matter.” A sample of Instrument #4 can be found in Appendix B.

### *Journal Responses*

Throughout the study, students completed several journal entries in their arts process portfolio, which is a required element of an arts course at the school. The students completed all journal responses in class at the end of specific lessons and used their laptops to type their responses. Table 2 shows the frequency with which students responded to the Three Good Things prompt in their journals during the study.

In the IRB application, twelve journal prompts were submitted as possible prompts that students could respond to over the course of the study. However, the researcher chose to use only the Three Good Things prompt out of the twelve prompts that were submitted to IRB. The rationale for using only one journal writing prompt will be explored further in the discussion chapter. The twelve journal prompts originally submitted to IRB can be found in Appendix A.

### *Teacher to student Interviews*

At the end of the semester, which was also the end of the research period, the researcher conducted face to face interviews with seven of the students who were participants in the study. Due to changes in the schedule for schoolwide end-of-year activities, not all students who participated in the study were available for the interviews.

Therefore, the researcher randomly selected three students who were available from Class A and four students from Class B to participate in interviews.

During the interviews, the students were asked a series of questions by the researcher about their overall experience with self-compassion and the effect it had on their view of themselves as dancers. They were asked questions such as, what if any challenges did you experience in having to look at three good things about yourself or your dance? The data gathered from the interviews were again assigned codes to protect student confidentiality. All the questions asked in the interviews, can be found in Appendix B.

Table 2

Date Research Instruments Were Administered

Instrument Title	Class A	Class B
Instrument #4 (Pre-survey)	January 31	January 31
Self-compassion (Pre-Survey)	February 7	February 7
Three Good Things #1	March 7	March 4
Three Good Things #2	March 14	March 14
Three Good Things #3	April 15	April 15
Three Good Things #4	April 23	April 23
Three Good Things #5	May 15	April 26
Three Good Things #6	June 7	June 6
Instrument #4 (Post -survey)	May 20	May 6
Self-compassion (Post-Survey)	June 7	June 6

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the data accumulated in this study. However, the majority of data gathered was analyzed using qualitative methods.

### *Quantitative Analysis*

Participants in the study completed the pre- and post Neff Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) surveys on-line. After the participants submitted their answers on-line, they printed their responses along with scores they received from the on-line tool for the six areas of self-compassion and also for their overall self-compassion score. Each response was given a numerical code to protect the participant's confidentiality.

The researcher entered the data or responses from this survey in Google Forms and then exported it to an Excel spreadsheet. On this sheet, the pre- and post-study responses were sorted into separate columns based on the six areas of self-compassion with an individual row for each student participant. This organization of the data enabled the researcher to readily identify changes in scores for each participant from the pre- to post-survey and analyze the data quantitatively.

The data gathered from Instrument #4, where students ranked their experiences and feelings about performing using a Likert scale of 1-5, was administered to participants during class using pen and paper. Each student's response was assigned a numerical code to protect the participants' confidentiality. The data were also then entered into an Excel document similar to the one used for the SCS data and sorted by individual student codes and also by their pre-and post-responses. The researcher analyzed the numerical data to determine changes in the students' responses between the

pre- and posttests, and also to determine the participants' most significant emotional responses, such as those who were embarrassed, tense, or nervous. The outcome of an analysis of the data accumulated through the use of Instrument #4 will be explored, described and compared in the Discussion chapter.

### *Qualitative Analysis*

Participants responded in their journals to the prompt of Three Good Things on six separate occasions during the semester-long study. Students responded to the prompt on their laptops at the end of class using a Google Form. The link to this form was posted on the teacher's Google Classroom site for students to access. The researcher removed any information that identified a student by name and used the assigned numerical code to identify each participant.

The researcher also exported these responses into an Excel spreadsheet, and then sorted the data by individual student. However, the data was sorted a second time for each student so their responses were viewed chronologically from the first response to the last one. The researcher examined these responses to identify themes and common ideas that emerged. These themes will be discussed in the Discussion chapter.

The face to face interviews were recorded using GarageBand and QuickTime and later transcribed by the researcher. The researcher analyzed the comments made by the participants in the interviews and again identified common themes and ideas.

### **Summary**

The researcher used several instruments to gather data that would answer the essential questions regarding the benefits of self-compassion. The research instruments included two pre- and post-surveys, journal responses and face to face interviews. Both

quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed for this study. The analysis and findings of the data will be presented in the Discussion chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of using techniques to improve self-compassion among students in the dance classroom. The researcher sought to answer the following essential questions in this study:

- Q1 To what extent can self-compassionate and other mindfulness practices benefit dance students?
- Q2 To what extent will the self-compassionate journal prompts effect the way students view their art and themselves as artists?
- Q3 To what extent can self-compassionate practices help students prepare for a dance performance?
- Q4 Which self-compassionate and mindfulness practices are most beneficial to students and best suited for the arts, in this case dance?
- Q5 What changes occurred in the students' level of self-compassion between the beginning of the class and its end?

This chapter presents the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative methods used for analyzing data in this research project. The significance of the findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

Two research instruments which produced data that could be analyzed quantitatively were used in this research study. These instruments included the Neff Self-Compassion study and a four-question survey, Research Instrument #4, in which participants recorded their responses using a Likert scale.



### *Analysis of Neff Self-Compassion Survey Data*

The Neff Self-Compassion Survey (SCS) was administered on-line to both classes at the beginning of the semester and again at the conclusion of the semester. The purpose of administering the survey in this way was to try to answer essential question five: What changes occurred in the students' level of self-compassion between the beginning of the class and its end?

The SCS measures a participant's responses for six subscales of self-compassion: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over identification. This survey was administered on-line and the data produced can be calculated as an overall score for self-compassion for each participant. An overall score of 1.0-2.5 is considered low in self-compassion; those scoring 2.5-3.5 are considered to have moderate self-compassion; and those participants scoring 3.5-5.0 are considered high in self-compassion. It is important to note that higher scores for the subscales of self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification indicate less self-compassion, whereas lower scores in these subscales indicate more self-compassion.

The researcher also averaged all the participants' subscale scores for each of the six components of the SCS since she was interested in possible changes in scores on each subscale. The average of subscale scores for all the participants in the survey can be seen in Table 3 below. From this table, it can be determined that the participants' scores between the pre- and post-survey increased only on the self-judgement subscale when the scores on each subscale for all participants were averaged together.

Table 3

Averaged Pre- and Post-Subscale Scores on Neff Self-Compassion Survey for All Participants

	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Self-kindness	3.02	2.74
Self-judgment	2.34	2.41
Common Humanity	2.91	2.55
Isolation	2.48	2.47
Mindfulness	2.95	2.91
Over Identification	2.63	2.27
Overall Self-Compassion	3.23	3.17

Although six self-compassion subscales are included in the Neff Survey, three are considered the main components of self-compassion. This distinction was discussed in the Review of Literature Chapter. These three subscales include self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Common humanity refers to the understanding that pain and failure are unavoidable and are part of the shared human experience (Neff et al. 908). Mindfulness is the awareness of painful experiences and acknowledging them rather than ignoring or exaggerating the pain those events may cause. This component requires the ability to face painful thoughts and feelings rather than avoid them (Neff, *Self-Compassion* 91).

In the current study, the researcher found that the averaged scores for these three components decreased between the pre- and post-survey. Here, in particular, the researcher expected to see gains because these survey components were targeted through the students' self-compassionate journal writing. It should also be pointed out that these decreased scores were on Neff subscales that are considered to be the positive aspects of self-compassion.

There was also a reduction in the averaged scores for over-identification, which refers to the process of exaggerating or being carried away by one's emotions (Neff and McGehee 226) and overall self-compassion, which is the combination of all of the components of self-compassion. Furthermore, there was a slight reduction in the averaged score for isolation, which refers to a subject's feeling that he or she is the only one experiencing pain and suffering or is the only one who is making mistakes (Neff and McGehee 226). The subscales of self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification are reverse coded when calculating for overall self-compassion. Therefore, a lower score for these aspects of self-compassion indicates the individual has improved.

The findings were somewhat different when the researcher viewed the participants' overall scores student-by-student. When the data were analyzed in this way there were eight participants whose overall self-compassion score increased between the pre- and post-surveys. Of those students, eight, three were female and five were male. It is interesting that more of the male students' overall self-compassion scores increased on the post-survey. This outcome can be viewed in Table 4 in which each student is identified with a numeric code. The first letter in the code refers to the gender of the

participant. The second number in the numeric code consists of either an 8 or a 7 to differentiate the grade level of the students involved in the study.

Table 4

Subjects with Increased Overall Scores on Neff Self-Compassion Survey

Student ID	Pre-survey	Post-survey
F0701	2.80	3.48
F0703	4.04	4.20
F0813	1.87	3.47
M0707	2.38	3.51
M0712	3.47	3.57
M0715	2.48	2.82
M0808	4.00	4.02
M0816	2.94	3.03

Nine participants in the study demonstrated a decrease in their overall self-compassion scores between the pre- and post-surveys. The majority of these students were female with seven females and two male students demonstrating a decrease in their overall self-compassion scores. These outcomes are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Subjects with Decreased Overall Scores on Neff Self-Compassion Survey

Student ID	Pre-survey	Post-survey
F0708	3.76	3.28
F0710	2.88	2.17
F0801	4.02	3.75
F0803	3.02	2.65
F0805	4.14	3.48
F0811	3.29	1.86
M0705	2.85	2.73
M0807	4.13	3.06
M0812	2.99	2.93

The gains in overall self-compassion scores among the eight students and the decreased overall self-compassion scores for the other nine students were an unexpected outcome of this study, especially after the researcher had the students repeat the Three Good Things journal entries during the study. This outcome will be discussed further in the qualitative analysis section of this chapter.

Table 6 below displays the number of students who were scored in one of three categories based on their overall self-compassion scores. It can be seen that there was a decrease by one student in the number of participants who were ranked in the low self-compassion category (1.0-2.5) and an increase by two participants in the number who ranked in the moderate self-compassion category (2.5-3.5). These findings are in keeping with the results the researcher expected to find. However, the number of students who

scored within the high level of self-compassion (3.5-5.0) decreased by one. The researcher had expected that the number of students in the high self-compassion category would increase as a result of using the self-compassion focused journal prompts.

Table 6

Number of Participants in each Category of Overall Self-Compassion

	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Low Self-Compassion	3	2
Moderate Self-Compassion	8	10
High Self-Compassion	6	5

For this part of the study, the researcher concluded that although there were changes in the participants' overall self-compassion scores, the majority of participants remained within the moderate level of self-compassion scoring between 2.5-3.5. The researcher had expected more significant gains in the high self-compassion category rather than a reduction. The post-survey overall scores for self-compassion surprised the researcher.

#### *Analysis of Responses to Research Instrument #4*

Research Instrument #4 was used to answer the first essential question: To what extent can self-compassionate and other mindfulness practices benefit dance students? This same research instrument was also used to answer the third essential question: To what extent can self-compassionate practices help students prepare for a dance performance? Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale. The possible choices

on this scale were: 5 (extremely), 4 (very), 3 (moderately), 2 (slightly), and 1 (not at all).

The subjects' responses for the twenty emotions can be seen in table 7 below.

Table 7

Instrument #4 Pre-Survey Responses Based on Individual Students' Scores					
Emotion	(1) Not at All	(2) Slightly	(3) Moderately	(4) Very	(5) Extremely
Sad	11	5	1	0	0
Dejected	9	5	3	0	0
Down	8	7	2	0	0
Depressed	14	2	1	0	0
Nervous	1	4	5	7	0
Tense	5	6	2	4	0
Worried	4	5	4	4	0
Anxious	3	9	3	2	0
Irritated	12	2	3	0	0
Angry	13	2	2	0	0
Hostile	12	4	1	0	0
Mad	13	2	1	1	0
Embarrassed	3	4	6	3	1
Humiliated	7	4	5	0	1
Disgraced	12	1	4	0	0
Ashamed	8	6	2	0	1
Incompetent	11	5	1	0	0
Worthless	14	0	1	1	1
Stupid	13	1	1	1	1
Self-conscious	7	5	4	1	0

Of the twenty possible emotions listed in the pre-survey, the researcher identified eleven emotions in which the students recorded scores at the four or five level on the Likert scale. These eleven emotions included nervous, tense, worried, anxious, mad, embarrassed, humiliated, ashamed, worthless, stupid, and self-conscious. There were twenty-nine students who recorded scores of four or five on the pre-survey for these eleven emotions. However, the students responded on the pre-survey at a level one for all

twenty emotions, although there were three emotions (nervous, anxious and embarrassed) in which seven of the seventeen students recorded a level one score for these three emotions. The outcome for those students who responded extremely and not at all on the pre-survey for the emotions noted above can be seen in Table 7.

The students' post-survey scores on Research Instrument #4 can be viewed in Table 8 below.

Table 8

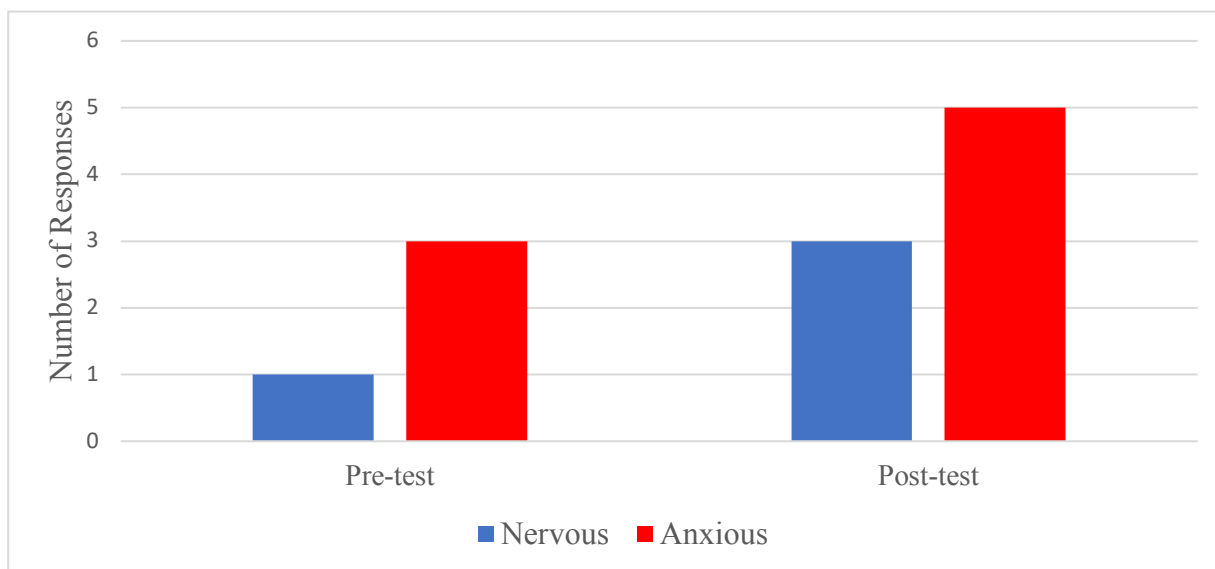
Instrument #4 Post-Survey Responses Based on Individual Students' Scores

Emotion	(1) Not at All	(2) Slightly	(3) Moderately	(4) Very	(5) Extremely
Sad	10	5	2	0	0
Dejected	11	4	1	1	0
Down	10	5	1	0	1
Depressed	13	2	1	0	1
Nervous	3	4	4	5	1
Tense	5	4	7	1	0
Worried	3	6	6	0	2
Anxious	5	6	3	3	0
Irritated	8	5	2	2	0
Angry	12	3	2	0	0
Hostile	14	3	0	0	0
Mad	13	1	3	0	0
Embarrassed	2	5	3	7	0
Humiliated	7	6	3	1	0
Disgraced	13	3	1	0	0
Ashamed	8	7	1	1	0
Incompetent	11	5	1	0	0
Worthless	14	1	0	1	1
Stupid	14	2	0	1	0
Self-conscious	7	8	2	0	0

A disappointing outcome was that twenty-nine students recorded scores of four or five on the post-survey for thirteen different emotions. These emotions included dejected,



down, depressed, nervous, tense, worried, anxious, irritated, embarrassed, humiliated, ashamed, worthless and stupid. In terms of positive outcomes, a combined total of eight students recorded a level one score (not at all) on the post-survey for the emotions nervous and anxious. This outcome is recorded in Figure 1 below.



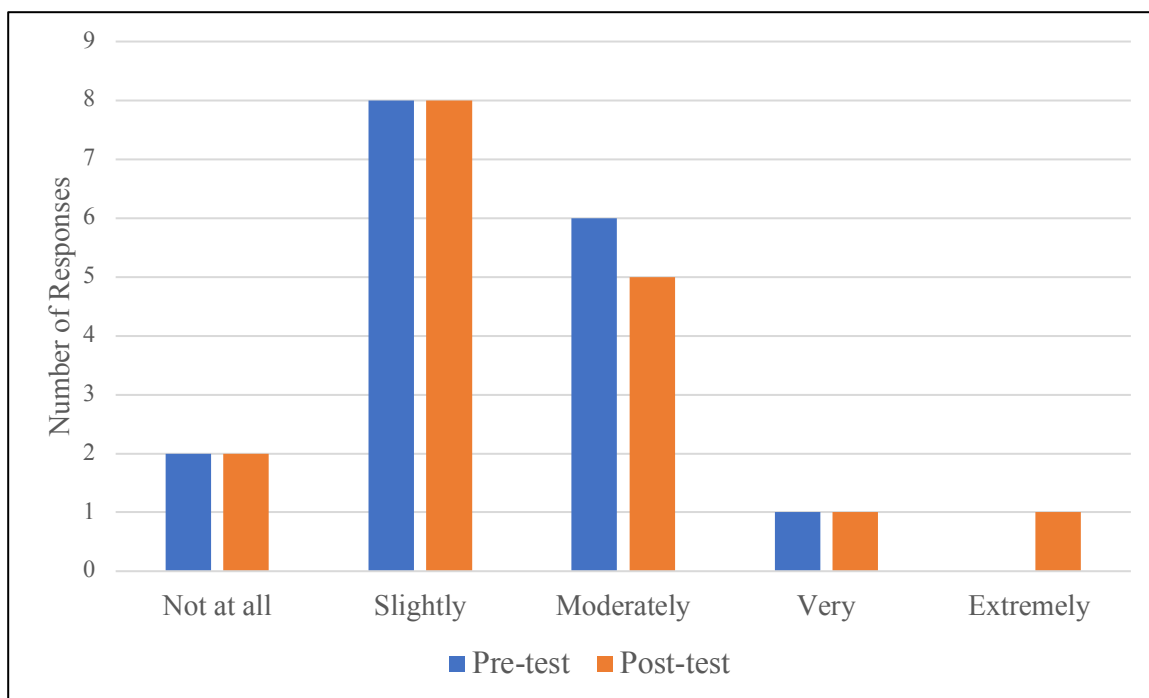
**Fig. 1.** Instrument #4: Pre- and Post-Survey Response to the Emotions Nervous and Anxious

In terms of feeling nervous, there was also a decrease on the post-survey in the number of students who responded moderately and very to this emotion. However, the researcher found that there was an increase by one participant who responded that he or she felt extremely nervous about performing, presenting, or making a mistake. The researcher expected to find increases in the numbers who reported not at all, in terms of feeling nervous, and did not expect an increase in the number who reported they felt extremely nervous. In addition, two more students felt not at all anxious by the time of the post-survey, although those feeling not at all embarrassed decreased by one student.

There was also an increase in the number of students who reported feeling not at all dejected, down, hostile, disgraced or stupid by the time of the post-survey, although

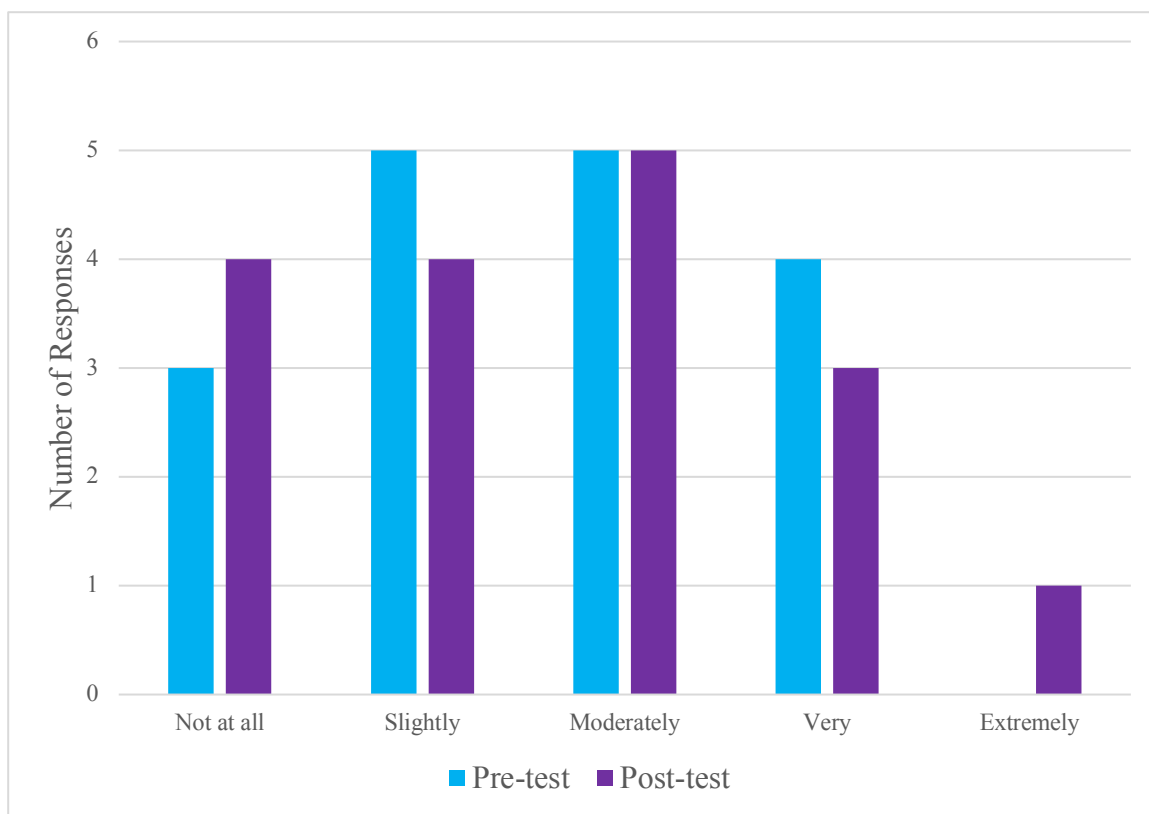
these were slight increases. For the emotions of dejected, down and hostile, two more students selected the not at all response on the post-survey in comparison to their selections on the pre-survey, while one more student selected the same level for the emotions of disgraced and stupid on the post-survey. These outcomes answered essential question #3: To what extent can self-compassion practices prepare students for performance.

Participants were also asked to respond to two questions on Instrument #4 about to what level they found performing for an audience or peers an unpleasant or stressful experience and whether they found viewing a video of their work an unpleasant or stressful experience. Participants rated their levels using the same Likert scale they used to rank their emotions. Although none of the participants responded in the pre-test that they found performing before an audience or watching a video of their dancing an extremely unpleasant or stressful experience, a surprising finding from this data was that in the post-test the number of students who said that they found it extremely unpleasant or stressful increased by one. The changes in the number of responses to these two questions can be seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below.



**Fig. 2.** Instrument #4 Question #1: Do you view performing for your peers or performing for an audience an unpleasant or stressful experience?

However, in response to the second question about whether or not viewing a video of their dance was unpleasant or stressful, there was an increase in the number of participants who responded with not at all between the pre- and post-test. The researcher expected that there would be a change in this category as students would feel less stress or anxiety about their work after the self-compassion interventions of the journal responses. The researcher had hoped to find results similar to those from the Marsh study that self-compassion interventions would reduce anxiety and stress and increase resilience. The results for the responses to the second question on the survey can be seen in Figure 3 below.



**Fig. 3.** Instrument #4 Question #2: Do you view watching your performance on a video an unpleasant or stressful experience?

Similar to the findings from the Neff SCS, the researcher was surprised to find an increase in the feelings of stress or discomfort, especially because this finding was not corroborated by the qualitative data gathered in the journals and the face-to-face interviews. These findings will be discussed later in the Discussion Chapter.

Overall, there were positive changes in the numbers of participants who reported feeling emotions that are typically experienced when performing or presenting before an audience. For those emotions, such as nervous, anxious, disgraced or stupid, there were increases in the numbers who responded that they did not feel these emotions at all in relation to performing or presenting their dances. These findings are similar to those that

were found in the students' journal responses and in the face-to-face interviews that will be discussed in the qualitative section of this chapter.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Two methods were used to gather data about the benefits of self-compassion on dance students that produced outcomes, which could be analyzed qualitatively. These two forms of data were the journal responses and face-to-face interviews.

#### *Analysis of Journal Responses*

The qualitative data gathered from the journal entries was used to answer Essential Question #3: To what extent will the self-compassionate journal prompts effect the way students view their art and themselves as artists? To answer this question, the researcher analyzed the journal responses to search for patterns and themes. The journal responses were then sorted into three themes: skills, recognizing others, and performance. Pseudonyms were given to each student whose responses appear in the discussion of the three themes to protect confidentiality.

#### **Skills**

Once sorted into the categories, the researcher noted that the majority of the responses fell under the theme of skills, with 320 total responses in the skills category alone. The theme of skills was divided further into several sub-categories: dance specific vocabulary and terminology; the devising process; and collaboration and group work.

The students had been introduced to dance specific terminology and vocabulary in the dance unit prior to the martial arts unit of study. The terminology that students had been introduced to was related to the elements of movement and dance and included specific descriptions of body, energy, space, and time. Students were also introduced to

terminology for choreographic devices, such as canon and unison. During the course, students were encouraged to use dance specific vocabulary when describing their work or reflecting on their process, but it was not the focus of the study and it was not mentioned as a requirement in the Three Good Things journal prompt.

When responding to Three Good Things in their journals, students identified specific aspects of their dance using terminology, such as sharp to describe the energy and quality of their movements. The samples that follow of student entries demonstrate how students used dance specific vocabulary, including vocabulary for the elements of dance and choreographic devices, in their writing. For example, Michelle wrote, “We worked on doing canon movements, but we also do sinronized [sic] movements too.” Molly noted how in her group they were able to, “... use some different elements of dance like a lot of space and time.” Andrew demonstrated his knowledge and understanding of the elements of dance in his response. “We were able to use all of the BEST [body, energy, space, and time] movements in our dance.” Trevor used dance vocabulary when he described that his group was, “... able to be symmetrical and do steps together.” Dominika also noted how her group, “...tried to use different levels when we do our moves.” Aaron found that using, “...shapes made our dance better.” Julia demonstrated her ability to synthesize her knowledge and understanding of the elements of dance and dance making skills. “...I learned to choreograph a dance properly by using different elements of dance.” Finally, Charlotte summarized her knowledge and understanding of choreographic devices. “I learned new dance devices. In the dance, my team used a canon to make the dance more interesting. I learned what kind of impression

canon leaves behind and I also learned that canon isn't hard to use but it leaves an interesting impression.”

Dance specific terminology that appeared throughout the journal entries included words such as canon, repetition, rhythm, space, synchronization, levels, body, timing, energy, sharp, and symmetrical. These responses confirmed the findings of researcher Betsy Cooper who found that using writing in the dance classroom enabled students to engage in the learning and demonstrate their skills and understanding through writing.

In addition to using dance specific vocabulary and terminology when writing about their dances, students were able to recognize their efforts and newly acquired skills in positive ways. For example, Andrew noted that, “We found out that we are flexible, and we could move in variant [sic] ways.” Molly described how, “We have eggagerated [sic] our movement and we use our whole body in our dance.” Their comments also included skills related to movements as well as their understanding of the concept of imitation of codified or set movements versus using the movement as inspiration for devising an original movement. For example, Drew recognized his growth in this new-found skill. “I think that I got a little better at being inspired and less imitating, because I don't just imitate an action in my dance, I exaggerate it and make it more of a dance.”

Students also shared in their Three Good Things responses how they applied the skills and martial arts movement learned in previous lessons or from the guest artists during the workshop. The samples from student journals that follow demonstrated some of the comments that students made about the application of their skills. Melissa commented on how, “The instructor taught us how to do the moves correctly, which could inspire us to turn them into dance moves.” Vera noted how she and her partner,

“...got really good at our trust falls.” She went on to say that, “We represented togetherness at the end, of the dance, which gave [it] a message/meaning.” Finally, Jacob noted the importance of his learning, “...some Taekwondo moves and self-defense positions.”

For most of the students, learning martial movements was a new experience. When students reflected on this experience, they did not focus on the negative or on the setbacks that they encountered. Instead, the researcher observed that students responded to their dance making and to their work as dancers with more self-compassion and emphasis on the positive. As Antek noted in his reflection, “I like how we have improved so much since we started. When we started we barely knew what to do.” Similarly, Melissa reflected on her overall acquisition and development of these skills:

I improved my motive in the dances I did. There was a message expressed in every dance and I learned how to convey the message through meaningful moves. Before in dance, I didn't really think of a message to express, but now I know that dance is made to create a message.

The second sub-category of skills involved the students’ responses to the dance making process. This category was comprised of responses that were focused on dance making, including: devising, revising, refining, and rehearsing. In this category, students identified the methods they used for devising and revising their dances that they felt were successful in helping them achieve their goal of creating and performing a final dance piece before an audience.

In this sub-category of skills, the researcher identified several journal responses to the Three Good Things prompt that focused on the strategies or skills they applied in order to create their dance pieces and that revealed how students viewed their developing dance making skills. For example, Karina noted how her group, “...wrote our plan on the



paper to make sure that we don't forget it." Michelle described how her group worked on transitions in the dance to make them, "...more interesting than just walking."

As part of the devising and revising process, students in the researcher's class used video recordings of their work. Students watched rehearsal videos that groups had recorded in previous classes to note the progress of their work and to identify places for revisions and refinements. Several students noted the positives of technology to aid in the devising and refining process. For example, Karina pointed out that her group, "...checked our spacing and watched the first rehearsal video and put [in] more energy." Jacob also described the positive aspects of viewing his group's work as part of the revision process:

I was able to look at the video of me and my group performing our second tech rehearsal, and we were able to see what we needed to work on... we saw what we needed to improve in our dance and spent some time during class rehearsing it, to make it meet our 'hoped expectations'.

Similar to the findings from the students' evaluation of their skills, when students were responding to their work and noting improvements or areas of the dance making process that were both successful and challenging, their responses validated the findings of several studies where self-compassion was found to enable one to approach their mistakes with acceptance and less self-criticism. The use of video was an important aspect of students being able to view their mistakes and to find immediate ways to make improvements and revisions. For example, Maya explained her group's successes in the revision process in the following way, "We watched our first run through and talked as a group to try and improve on our mistakes all together." Maya noted that, "The first good thing that my dance group did good was we worked on keeping the timing right throughout the whole song, since when we looked at the video we realized that we all

weren't synchronised." She further described the benefits of using video to help her group, "...add more energy to our dance since at first when we watched our latest video we lacked energy and enthusiasm." Maya's response and the responses of others in the class confirmed the benefits of what researchers Breines and Chen found in their study where students used a self-compassionate lens to view their weaknesses with acceptance and as something that was changeable.

Students used their Three Good Things journal responses as an opportunity to identify perceived mistakes or areas of dance making that needed improvement. Similar to their skills-related responses, students approached this facet of the choreographic process with acceptance and self-compassion rather than harsh judgment of their work or of what they perceived to be mistakes. For example, Jacob noted how he and his group, "...were able to add and replace things from the dance to make it better and become closer to our hopes, which makes me feel pretty happy and successful, knowing that our dance is still allowed, though it is more of a theatrical performance." Jane was able to recognize that, "There were lots of mistakes in the past (there's still in these ones [sic]) but it feels like it decreased [more] than before." Aaron also focused on his group's positive approach toward mistakes. "The last good thing that we did was that our dance is almost finished now and we finished all of the mistakes that needed to be fixed. Now we only have to add some small things to our dance just to make it a bit longer."

As part of the revising process, some students identified how they were able to use feedback from the teacher, who was also the researcher, and others without focusing on the corrections or perceiving them as a setback. For example, Antek described how, "In the beginning we were unsure on the fight and now we are more confident and know

more on what we are doing.” Karina noted that, “Our group used all the time to give feedback to each other while practicing.”

By recognizing the challenges and successes of the process for planning and creating dances, these responses demonstrated student engagement in the dance making process as noted by researcher Betsy Cooper in her study. For example, Melissa reflected on her overall experience in the dance making process. “I learned how to develop a process of creating a dance. Now, when I create a dance, I develop the process and make it very detailed and think of every aspect of the dance.”

The student responses in which they recognized their acquisition and application of skills confirmed the findings of the Neff et al. study of the correlation between self-compassion and being more open and accepting of oneself and being open to new experiences, such as learning a martial art, or having openness to the world in general (Neff et al. 913). Furthermore, the responses in this category, where students chronicled their achievements in a tone that inferred excitement and confidence in their progress, further support Neff and McGehee’s findings that self-compassion can increase motivation rather than passivity.

The skills category of the journal responses not only included dance making skills, but also those considered important 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of collaboration and group work. To create the dances for their summative task, the students collaborated in small groups of four to six dancers. Group work for adolescents can present many challenges, especially with sharing ideas and maintaining focus during class. To facilitate collaboration amongst the students, some collaboration skills were taught explicitly throughout the unit, such as assigning weekly roles within the group (lead choreographer,

music lead, costume designer, etc.), and establishing daily or weekly goals for what each group needed to accomplish.

Students used these skills while collaborating and identified these abilities in their Three Good Things journal responses. They identified aspects of collaborative group work that were successful such as time management, communication, and listening to and considering the ideas of others. For example, Betty focused on her group's success by noting, "Everyone's engagement in what we were doing was really cool because it made the dance more intense because of everyone's participation." She went on to comment on specific strategies that her group used in order to collaborate effectively. "It was important that we sat in a circle and discussed what we should change in our dance since sometimes we can't accomplish things since we are all talking at the same time." Julia also commented on her group's ability to communicate effectively. "All of us communicated well. If someone had an idea they would say [it] to everyone and if someone didn't like something, then they would say it. We also encouraged each other to have more energy which helped our ending product." Karina connected her group's success to collaboration. "Everyone was involved in choreography and no one was excluded." The ability to communicate effectively also contributed to students feeling empathy and connectedness toward their classmates. As Charlotte indicated in her response:

The first good thing is I tried to listen to everyone's ideas and thoughts on any project we were doing. For example, the martial arts related dance was with a big group and I tried to make sure everyone had a turn to speak and share their ideas with the group so everyone can participate. My second good thing is that I tried to check in if everyone is comfortable with the dance moves in case someone is not comfortable and gets discouraged. When someone was uncomfortable with a certain dance move, I asked for their opinion on a dance move with something they are more comfortable with.

In addition to noting successful communication skills when collaborating, some students noted positive outcomes of time management. For example, Drew described his group's efforts and desire to work together outside of class. "Our group worked well together, we communicated well, shared our ideas, and took our one time such as lunch and break time to practice our dance and to improve it. This made our dance much better, because we were not distracted while working."

Although there were many successes with group work that were identified by students, there were also challenges with collaboration for some groups. Students were able to identify and acknowledge some of the discomfort or challenge of working in a group to accomplish tasks in order to meet a deadline. Students used their Three Good Things responses to identify challenges, such as issues with communication and engagement, or working in a group where students were disengaged or absent. The samples that follow demonstrate the types of responses that addressed this specific challenge. For example, Jon noted how they had to change, "...our dance and it worked out because a friend wasn't there." He went on to state that, "We improved our fighting without a partner that is gone." Andrew responded to the struggle of having two students in his group who were disruptive or off-task. "I got a good group for all of the performances and although I had to control the group...we ended up having a decent dance." Drew noted that, "Even if my group was not engaged, we managed to get everybody engaged and working together and participating."

The researcher recognized that in these responses, students described those challenges with equanimity and positivity, rather than judgment or harsh criticism of themselves or their peers. Instead, students identified these challenges with acceptance

and problem-solving strategies. For example, Charlotte wrote, “Today we did a lot of reflecting and talking to improve on problems.” Adam noted, “We added a new part to our dance, which was surprising because we will have only 3 people in our group.” These comments support the findings of Neff that self-compassion enables one to respond without being overly critical. The samples from student journal responses demonstrate the self-compassionate approach students used toward evaluating work done by their group.

From the prompts that were analyzed in the skills category, the researcher found that students used Three Good Things as an opportunity to identify the successes and failures of collaboration and how their group was functioning. Julia’s response best demonstrates the findings from the Leary study that self-compassion enables one to identify a difficult situation and respond to a perceived setback with equanimity and mindfulness. Julia wrote the following comment in her journal:

We tried to include everyone. Some people hadn’t contributed as much as other people. So, we decided to brainstorm and said ideas that our next part of the dance could have. We used everyone’s thinking to make the dance and I think that we should be proud of that.

### **Recognizing Others**

One surprising finding from the journal responses was that students used the Three Good Things prompt as an opportunity to acknowledge the accomplishments and improvements of other students in the class. Students responded without being prompted to recognize someone else in their group or class. For example, Charlotte recognized the strengths of her classmate’s dance skills. “Vera was very emotional and into the music causing her dance moves to be very passionate, present, and aware of what is going [on] around her. She made the dance be more emotional and send the message of love and

pain.” Similarly, Melissa was recognized for her dance abilities and improvements in the class and for bringing “... a very good energy to the dance. When she needed to be serious, she was fierce and showed power and strength, but when she was behind the scene, she gave a calm, loving, and soft vibe.”

Students recognized not only the efforts of other students in the class, but also one of the three components of self-compassion, common humanity, which is seeing themselves as part of a collective human experience (Neff et al. 908). Charlotte’s journal response pointed to this aspect of self-compassion:

The first good thing is how everyone is giving each other ideas and we are all learning from each other. We are all going through this journey together and all combining our knowledge to make an amazing dance. Each person is trying their best and contributing ideas to improve.

Through the self-compassion intervention of Three Good Things journal prompt, students were able to view the work of others with support and empathy. As noted by other researchers, this is a crucial skill for this age group to practice especially when they often feel judged by their peers.

### **Performance**

The third theme that emerged from the journal responses related to the actual performance of the dances before a live audience. The audiences for the two performances were comprised of students in grades 1-4 as well as teachers, classroom assistants, and parents.

Many of the responses reflected on the use of production elements, such as lighting and costumes, to enhance the dance performance. For example, Bob noted that, “...the lights and the music was [sic] all good timing. Also, the dance were [sic] in time with the music and the lights, and that is what counts.” Other students also identified the

lighting as an important aspect of their performance. For example, Michelle responded that, “The lights defiantly [sic] make the dance even more powerful than it already is.” Similarly, Jacob found that, “The lights, spotlight, and music all worked together, and we changed the dance, that made it better and more comfortable for all performers.”

Other responses in the performance category identified mistakes or perceived setbacks when presenting to a live audience. In the responses, students recognized that mistakes were made, but similar to the findings of responses that related to skills, students faced these mistakes with acceptance rather than self-criticism. For instance, Bob noted that, “Everyone enjoyed the dance and no one judged us, and we tried our best to make it a good and fun dance.” Betty also recognized her group’s imperfections and emotions, and similar to the conclusions in previous studies, self-compassion enabled her to respond with self-kindness. “Even though we messed some things up we kept going and stayed confident... We performed with passion even though we were nervous and a little embarrassed in front of our peers.”

Students not only responded with self-kindness and to their work, but also with common humanity. Recognizing and accepting these emotions as a part of the common human experience is an important aspect of self-compassion. Furthermore, as was noted in the study by Sbarra, those who possess the trait of self-compassion are less self-deprecating when facing or acknowledging perceived imperfections or shortcomings (267). This was evident in Melissa’s response where she acknowledged her emotions of feeling nervous when performing before a large audience and responded with self-compassion:

We performed calmly in front of the audience. We never practiced in front of an audience. We were extremely nervous before the performance and the fact that we



performed very calmly and normally in front of the whole middle school is pretty impressive.

Students were able to use the self-compassion interventions to see that mistakes and challenges when performing are inevitable, but also manageable. As Kai described, “We faced difficulties and made the performance alright.”

Overall, students responded with positive reactions to performing rather than focusing on any anxiety they may have been feeling. In contrast to the findings from research instrument #4 where there was a surprising increase in the number of students who reported feeling extremely nervous or stressed about performing, the researcher found journal responses that reflected positive feelings and attitudes toward performing. Several students reported feeling satisfied with their performance and could recognize the benefits of performing their art before an audience. For example, Bob noted the positive emotions he experienced after performing because, “...the kids in the audience enjoyed the dance, and they liked it. That made all the dancers happy and felt like they want to do it again! We all had fun and the energy was really good!” Jane provided a similar response to performing. She wrote, “It looked like everyone tried their best in the performance so I just feel good for [sic] it.” Jacob also emphasized the satisfaction he experienced after performing before an audience. “A lot of the audience members really liked our performance the best, which makes me and my group feel happy that we were successful in entertaining the audience with our performance.” These responses confirm the findings from Leary et al. that those with self-compassion are able to respond with more emotional balance and accept the imperfections without a negative self-view (901).

Students also identified aspects of performing that answered essential question number two: To what extent will the self-compassionate journal prompts effect the way

students view their art and themselves as artists. For one student, performing helped her see the value of her art and the influence it might have on an audience. She described how her dance had, "...a very strong message which is [it was] not only cool to watch but also could be a different way of thinking." Antek summarized his experience of dance-making and performing. He responded, "I enjoyed that we got to practice and be prepared for something that might happen in the real world."

*Analysis of Student Writing  
Chronologically by  
Student*

The journal responses were sorted in Excel by student and then also in chronological order from the oldest to newest entries. This method of sorting the data resulted in several findings that were interesting to the researcher.

Other findings from evaluating the data chronologically included noting an increase in the overall length of the responses. Many of the first journal responses to the Three Good Things prompt consisted of single word responses, such as "Fun" or "Creativity." In some cases, for their first entries, students wrote, "I could only think of two" or "IDK [I don't know]." However, the researcher noted that the length of the responses and the depth to which students evaluated or analyzed their work increased over the course of the study. This can be attributed to students becoming more comfortable with the task of responding to Three Good Things in their journals. For example, when he was asked in the face-to-face interview about the most challenging aspect of the self-compassionate approach, Drew responded, "...I was kind of scared to show my ideas, but over time I got used to sharing my ideas."

Students were able to include more detailed and thoughtful responses as they became more accustomed to the task and the routine of responding. For example, by the fourth Three Good Things prompt, the researcher observed that students were able to begin the task of writing without asking clarifying questions such as, “What can I write about?” Instead, they were able to focus on the task by being self-directed. This finding confirms the decision of the researcher to only repeat the one Three Good Things journal prompt throughout the study rather than give students the twelve different journal prompts which were originally submitted with the IRB application.

Similar to the findings from the King study in which it was concluded that switching prompts interrupted the flow, the writing by the students in the current study became more fluent, coherent, and detailed as the study continued. This outcome was also related to Neff and McGehee’s findings that self-compassion can be enhanced through practice (236).

#### *Analysis of Face to Face Interviews*

One of the findings the researcher observed was that the journal responses were written in first person, with the majority of students using the pronoun we more frequently than the pronoun I. In all three of the thematic categories of journal responses described earlier, students were able to discuss and evaluate their work without criticism or harsh judgment. However, few reflected on their own work as an individual dancer. Data collected through student interviews confirmed that students felt more comfortable reflecting on positives when they referred to the whole group versus reflecting on their individual accomplishments. In her interview, Melissa explained her

reasons for preferring to write about the group instead of discussing her work as an individual:

I think focusing on myself, it was a little harder. I think [I] like [discussing our work] as a group because you can see how the group improved as well and there's also different parts of the group, like let's say the energy of the group or the way the group is synchronized. So yeah, I think there's more things that I think I could say about improvement [by talking about the group's efforts].

In the face-to-face interviews, students were asked about the ways in which responding to the Three Good Things prompt reduced their stress or anxiety about performing or presenting their dance to an audience. Several of the students interviewed noted the benefits of the Three Good Things prompt in reducing their stress and anxiety. For some students like Beth, practicing the self-compassionate response of Three Good Things provided reassurance and helped to bolster their confidence. Beth affirmed that the Three Good Things practice gave her confidence, "I felt like after we practiced the dance, like realizing, Oh wow, we actually are doing something cool. When I'm going to perform, especially for the shadow dance, when we perform, [the audience] is going to feel something I think."

Another student, Andrew, described how the Three Good Things prompt shaped the way he viewed his dance and his ability to perform when he stated, "We knew the good parts of the dance and we knew that we had practiced enough times, so it was almost perfection in those parts that were good. So, we knew that it was all going to be fine." For Drew, writing about Three Good Things helped him with performing and, "...like being more ambitious about being able to do it because I was always really scared to perform, but I think looking at Three Good Things makes me realize that it's really not that bad to perform." These responses from the interviews confirmed the

researcher's findings from the analysis of journal responses discussed earlier of the benefits of the Three Good Things prompt in reducing the stress and anxiety felt by students when performing their dances.

Another finding from the face-to-face interviews was the ability for students to transfer their skills of self-compassion to other classes or learning situations. Students used the skill learned from using the Three Good Things prompt even though it was not given as a formal reflection activity by their other content teachers. For example, Melissa commented that in other aspects of her learning she does, "...notice three good things. Like sometimes in a situation I'll try to find the good parts, the good things. Like let's say if there's a project, I will try to find the things I improved on." Similarly, Drew noted how he was able to use the Three Good Things prompt as a way to approach his work in other classes with an inner dialogue of self-kindness rather than self-judgment or recrimination. "Sometimes. I think I would be like ok, look, I did these three good things. So, I think I got better at looking at the positives." Andrew described how, "...it's a good idea to always be reminded that there's always something good. Just know that there's always something good in what you're doing."

An additional finding from the interviews pertained to the overall benefit of the self-compassion practice of focusing on Three Good Things. All the students who were interviewed responded affirmatively when asked if they enjoyed thinking about Three Good Things or saw benefits from this self-compassion intervention. Melissa replied that, "...it's [the Three Good Things journal prompt] not a detailed question, it can be more [sic] free. So, it's not limited to that one specific question." Beth further explained why practicing self-compassion was beneficial for her as a teen because, "...it's like positive

thinking and it would maybe help cheer me up sometimes. Because you just think about all the bad things you're doing and never really realize all the good things that are going on." She went on to agree that using a self-compassion technique such as Three Good Things would help to shift her thinking to become more positive. As Neff and McGehee found in their research, teens are overly concerned with self-evaluation which is often unfavorable at this stage of adolescent development (225). Beth's response demonstrates the findings from Bluth and Blanton that were discussed in the Literature Review that teens are more prone to self-judgment and questioning of self-worth (1300). Therefore, as evidenced by Beth's response, self-compassion interventions are valuable and needed for adolescents in order to reframe their thinking. Furthermore, the data from the interviews confirmed that focusing on the positive aspects of their work had more emotional benefits for participants than writing about negative aspects (King 800).

The data from several of the interviews also confirmed the findings regarding the benefits of self-compassion interventions beyond the dance classroom. In her study, Betsy Cooper had found that reflective writing helped students to shift their perception of themselves as dancers and learners (4). One student shared how this self-compassion intervention could be applied beyond the dance class and the study by saying, "I can use three good things for my whole life, like what's good and what needs to be improved."

### **Unanswered Research Questions**

The researcher sought to answer the essential question #4: Which self-compassionate and mindfulness practices are most beneficial to students and best suited for the arts, in this case dance? However, the data collected did not answer this question specifically. The researcher had intended to provide students with a variety of prompts,

such as the twelve that were originally submitted to the IRB in preparation for the study. Instead, the researcher chose to focus on one prompt, Three Good Things, that was repeated over the course of the semester length study. Therefore, the researcher was unable to determine which prompts were most beneficial to students since only one prompt was used.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the effects of using techniques to improve self-compassion among students in the dance classroom. The researcher sought to answer the following essential questions in this study:

- Q1 To what extent can self-compassionate and other mindfulness practices benefit dance students?
- Q2 To what extent will the self-compassionate journal prompts effect the way students view their art and themselves as artists?
- Q3 To what extent can self-compassionate practices help students prepare for a dance performance?
- Q4 Which self-compassionate and mindfulness practices are most beneficial to students and best suited for the arts, in this case dance?
- Q5 What changes occurred in the students' level of self-compassion between the beginning of the class and its end?

The participants in the study were seventeen seventh and eighth graders who attended a private international school in Europe.

### **Research and Analysis Methods**

As described in the Methodology Chapter, several research instruments were used to collect data that would address the essential questions of this study. The instruments included the Neff Self-Compassion Survey (SCS), Instrument #4, journal writing prompts and interviews. The Neff SCS, which was administered to participants on-line both at the beginning and end of the study, was used to calculate scores for overall self-compassion as well as scores for the key components of self-compassion including self-kindness and mindfulness. When using the Instrument #4, participants responded to four questions



about their feelings regarding how they felt about performing their dances by ranking their experiences and feelings using a Likert scale of 1-5. This latter instrument was also administered pre- and post-study. The participants responded in their journals to the prompt of Three Good Things on six separate occasions during the semester-long study. At the end of the research project, several students were selected to participate in face-to-face interviews with the researcher. The data gathered using the Neff Self-Compassion Survey and Instrument #4 were analyzed using quantitative methods, while the data that emerged from the students' journal entries and interviews were analyzed qualitatively.

### **Conclusions Based on Current Study**

The following summary of conclusions in this study was organized according to the research instruments used.

#### *Analysis of Scores on Neff Self-Compassion Survey*

The researcher found that the subscale scores for the positive components of self-compassion, including self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, decreased the most on the post-survey. However, on this same instrument there was also a slight improvement for the component of self-judgment. The researcher noted improvements for two of the three negative components of self-compassion, isolation and over identification on the post-survey as well.

When the data was analyzed by individual students, the researcher found that there was a decrease in the averaged scores of overall self-compassion for nine of the seventeen participants in the study. The remaining eight students in the study showed increases in overall self-compassion. It should be noted that there were more male

students in the group with increased scores and more female students in the group with decreased scores. In addition, most of the students had achieved a moderate level of self-compassion at the end of the study based on their overall scores.

*Analysis of Scores on Research  
Instrument #4*

For this research instrument, students had to use a five-point Likert scale on both the pre- and post-surveys to evaluate how they felt with regards to twenty possible emotions they could experience when performing. There was a combined total of twenty-nine recorded scores of four (very) or five (extremely) for eleven different emotions on the pre-survey. A disappointing outcome was that on the post-survey, there were a total of twenty-nine recorded scores of four or five for thirteen different emotions. However, on the positive side, eight students recorded a score of one (not at all) on the post-survey for the emotions nervous and anxious. There was also a slight increase in the number of students who recorded a score of one on the post-survey for the emotions dejected, down, hostile, disgraced or stupid.

The students were also expected to respond to two questions on Instrument #4. In response to the first question, there was a decrease in the number of students who found performing for an audience moderately stressful, although one more student found this experience to be extremely stressful by the end of the study. When asked whether they found viewing a video of their performance stressful, fewer students felt slightly or very stressed, but one more student felt this experience to be extremely stressful.

Based on the quantitative data alone, the researcher determined that there were modest improvements to the ways in which students viewed their work and themselves as

artists, and in how prepared students felt for a performance as a result of the self-compassion intervention of responding to the Three Good Things prompt.

#### *Analysis of Students' Journal Entries*

Three themes emerged from the students' journal entries: skills, recognizing others and performance, with the majority of the responses falling in the skills category. The skills the students felt they learned during the study included dance specific terminology; martial arts movements; choreographic craft including devising, revising, refining and rehearsing; and various 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, such as collaboration, communication, establishing goals, and managing time effectively. For the second theme of recognizing others, the students acknowledged not only the accomplishments of other students and groups in their classes, but also their participation in the collective human experience. Students were able to view the work of others by being supportive and empathetic. In regards to the performance theme, the students noted their use of production elements, faced mistakes with acceptance rather than criticism, acknowledged performance challenges without focusing on them, and recognized the value of their dance as art. The researcher also found the students' journal responses increased in length and detail as the study progressed.

#### *Analysis of the Face-to-Face Interviews*

During these interviews, students noted how they were able to more readily reflect on positives when discussing work accomplished by the whole group, rather than focusing on their own individual achievements. Some students also felt the self-compassion interventions reduced their stress level, allowed them to view their dance and

its performance in a less negative way, and enabled them to transfer their newly learned self-compassion skills to other classes and learning situations. All of the students interviewed described benefits of the self-compassion practices as well.

### **Explanation of Unanticipated Findings**

As noted earlier in this chapter and the Discussion Chapter, there were several surprising findings from using the Neff Self-Compassion Survey (SCS) and Instrument #4. While the researcher had anticipated more improvements in the areas of overall self-compassion and a reduction in the responses of very or extremely when considering performing, there were slight declines in these areas. There are several explanations for these outcomes.

One explanation was that during the study, the students did not receive direct and explicit instructions on specific techniques for reducing stress and anxiety when performing. The researcher relied solely on the self-compassion journal prompt to mitigate these emotions.

Another explanation for the modest changes in students' overall self-compassion could be the seriousness with which students approached the on-line SCS. Some students had indicated verbally to the teacher that they randomly selected numbers on the survey in order to finish the survey quickly.

For both research instruments, the SCS and Instrument #4, some students struggled with the vocabulary and understanding the questions that were being asked. This may have impacted the accuracy with which students responded to both surveys. Furthermore, one explanation for the increase on the Instrument #4 post-survey for those who felt very or extremely nervous and anxious about performing, was that students

completed the survey after their performance. Some students had never performed before, so their response on the pre-survey was based on a hypothetical situation, whereas their response on the post-survey was based on their actual experience. These students may have found performing more stressful than they had originally anticipated.

### **Limitations of Study**

There were several limitations to the current study, including aspects related to the participants in the study and the level of instruction in self-compassion.

The first limitation was the number of participants in the sample. Of the twenty-seven students in the two sections of the dance class, only seventeen students returned a parent consent form. A larger sample size was needed in order to determine the effectiveness of the self-compassion intervention more thoroughly. In addition to a small sample size, absences due to illness or participation in sports and other activities hindered the ability for groups to devise their dances and for students to complete the Three Good Things responses in a consistent way.

Other limitations regarding the participants included their maturity and overall engagement. Student participants ranged in age from twelve to fourteen years of age. Some of the responses in the Three Good Things journal entries indicated that the participants did not take the tasks or the questions seriously. Although there were only a few puerile responses in the qualitative data that could not be interpreted, the few that did appear caused the researcher to consider the age and maturity of the participant population as a potential limitation. Furthermore, some students in the class were designated as English Language Learners who received additional language support from the school. These students often needed clarification of the vocabulary that appeared on

the Neff Self-Compassion Survey and research instrument #4. This issue may have hindered students from answering questions in a way that represented their ideas and feelings more precisely.

Another limitation of the study was the lack of diversity among the student participants. Similar to the Neff and McGehee study in which the researchers determined that the findings could not be applied to more diverse populations because their participants were mostly white and middle class, the socio-economic status of the students in the current study was middle to upper class. The participants attend a private international school that charges an annual tuition of \$35,000 per student. A sample of participants that includes those from more diverse socio-economic backgrounds was needed to more accurately affirm the benefits of the self-compassion interventions.

The final limitation to the study was that students did not receive explicit instruction in self-compassion techniques other than responding to the Three Good Things journal prompt. Providing more explicit instruction might have helped students to better understand the benefits and purpose of self-compassion.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

One suggestion for further study is to research how other external factors may contribute to how a student might view their art and themselves as artists. In the Neff and McGehee study, researchers examined the possible contributing factors to self-compassion, such as maternal support and family functioning (235). These factors were outside the scope of the current research; however, factors such as support at home, maternal support, and family functioning could be contributing factors to how one views their art and themselves as an artist. A study would be needed to measure whether there is

a correlation between support at home and how parents view the efforts or the desire of the child or children to participate in dance or other arts and a student's level of self-compassion.

Based on the interview responses of the participants in this study, students had indicated that although they did not write it down, they used the Three Good Things response to recognize the positive aspects of their work in other classes. Further research is needed to determine the impact that self-compassion techniques could have in other areas of academics or other aspects of a student's life, including visual arts and other performing arts classes, or extra-curricular activities such as sports.

Investigating the benefits of self-compassion and goal setting and achievement in adolescents is also needed. Research as to whether including a self-compassionate focus would help students to reach a personal specific goal rather than focusing on performance is needed to determine if this would make their goal setting more autonomous and motivation more intrinsic. To this end, research is needed to investigate the health benefits for adolescents of self-compassion interventions or journal prompts that are more self-regulatory and that ask students to explore how they have grown as a dancer or performer and that focus on the positive aspects of their dancing ability.

In the current study, students did not receive feedback on their journal entries from the teacher, who was also the researcher. The researcher read the journal entries of each student, but did not provide a written or verbal response. In the Cooper study discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, the researcher found when the instructor used the information students wrote about, in terms of what they were struggling with or the difficulties they were having reaching their goals, that this information contributed to the

“...communal and collaborative aspects of learning to dance...thereby lessening hypercritical and self-defeating attitudes” (10). Further research could investigate the impact of teacher conferencing based on a student’s level of self-compassion, motivation, and goal attainment.

Further research is also needed to investigate the correlation between self-compassion interventions and motivation in adolescents in regard to the performing arts. This research could determine whether self-compassion interventions would enhance a student’s motivation to develop and refine their skills and prepare for performance.

The final suggestion for further research is to answer essential question #4 from the current study: Which self-compassionate and mindfulness practices are most beneficial to students and best suited for the arts, in this case dance? Incorporating other self-compassion interventions and practices, such as Best Possible Self (BPS), would help to address this question. Researchers in the King study discussed earlier in the Review of Literature had found that BPS-motivated writing enabled students to access fantasies about their future, which may lead to better health benefits such as decreased anxiety and feelings of being in control of their destiny (805). Further research is needed to determine whether BPS in conjunction with the Three Good Things writing prompt would provide benefits of resiliency and higher levels of self-compassion.

## **Summary**

Over the course of this study, participants were able to focus on the positive aspects of their work, including their dance making process of devising, revising, and performing their work before an audience. Viewing their work through this positive lens enabled students to identify the positive qualities of developing not only their dance



making skills, but also their personal contributions to the group, and their group's progress. Students responded positively and with self-compassion to the acquisition and application of newly developed dance skills. Through the use of the self-compassion intervention of the Three Good Things journal prompt, students were able to see the positives of their art and presenting their dances even though they were developing dancers with limited to no prior dance experience.

Students indicated through journal responses and interviews that the self-compassion intervention of Three Good Things lowered their stress and anxiety about their work and performing. Three Good Things prompt also enabled students to shift their mindset away from looking for what was not working or was not good enough, to what was working well. They were able to provide positive affirmations of their work through the self-compassion intervention.

The ability to practice self-kindness and self-compassion is a skill that also benefited the researcher. Over the course of the study, she noticed a shift in how she approached not only her teaching, but also her own dance practice, and everyday interactions that were challenging or uncomfortable. Where once she may have practiced negative self-talk, harsh self-criticism, and judgment, the researcher utilized these same tools to mitigate these feelings and silence the inner critic. There is a joy and pleasure in her teaching and dancing that did not exist before.

As students face the increasing and challenging social and educational pressures of adolescence, self-compassion interventions provide benefits for students both within and beyond the dance classroom. At a time when adolescents are particularly prone to

judgment, self-criticism, and negative social comparison, practicing and developing skills of self-compassion can only provide students with long-lasting benefits.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTS



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: December 5, 2018

TO: Kathleen Stein

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1336576-2] Using Self-compassionate Focused Writing Prompts by Middle School Students in the Dance Classroom: Shaping How Students Respond to their Art and View Themselves as Artists.

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: December 5, 2018

EXPIRATION DATE: December 5, 2019

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of December 5, 2019.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or [nicole.morse@unco.edu](mailto:nicole.morse@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

*Please ensure that prior to your data collection, you adhere to the new EU General Data Protection Regulations. Nicole Morse will be reaching out to you to offer further assistance.*

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.





CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
PARENT/GUARDIAN

**Thesis Title:** *Using Self-compassionate Focused Writing Prompts by Middle School Students in the Dance Classroom: Shaping How Students Respond to their Art and View Themselves as Artists.*

**Researcher:** Katie Stein, Graduate Student at the University of Northern Colorado

**Contact Information:** kstein@aaaaaaaa.org

**Research Advisor:** Dr. Sandra Minton, University of Northern Colorado,  
[sandra.minton@unco.edu](mailto:sandra.minton@unco.edu)

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study of the effectiveness of using self-compassionate reflection techniques when writing about the dances they create in class and when writing about their dance making process. I am asking for your permission for your child to take part because your child signed up for dance class at the School. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow your child to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The aim of this research is to discover answers to several questions: (1) To what extent can self-compassionate and other mindfulness practices benefit dance students? (2) To what extent will the self-compassionate journal prompts affect the way students view their art and themselves as artists? (3) To what extent can self-compassionate practices help students to prepare for a dance performance? (4) Which self-compassionate and mindfulness practices are most beneficial to students and best suited for the arts, in this case dance? (5) What changes occurred in the students' level of self-compassion between the beginning of the class and its end. As part of the graduate thesis project, the research will assist the researcher and future readers of the final thesis, including members of the Arts department, in understanding the benefits of using self-compassionate focused journal prompts when reflecting on artistic work.

**Risks:** The risks and discomforts inherent in this study are no greater than those normally encountered during regular dance class participation, when taking a survey or writing in one's journal. If you participate, you agree to take responsibility for all risks involved, and the teacher, university and the School are not liable. If certain writing prompts cause discomfort, the student may skip writing in response to that prompt or may find an alternate way of answering the prompt in a way with which they are comfortable.

**Student answers will be confidential.** Every effort will be made to protect your child's identity. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your child. A code system will be used to identify all participant responses including the pre-test, journal, post-test, and interview information. Interviews with each student will take place at the end of the semester to ask questions about the project and to clarify responses submitted in the journal writes. Each interview should last approximately 10-15 minutes and will be conducted during class time. Students not included in this study will fully participate in the dance class as scheduled. Students will be given extended time to complete work they might miss while participating in the interviews. No actual names will be used in any data compiled from this study. I will use pseudonyms or numerical codes. The goal of the research is to simply document the success of using journal prompts that are focused on promoting self-compassion. All documents pertaining to this study will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Annex Building on the campus of the School. No one else will have access to this cabinet. All completed consent forms will be stored in Crabbe Hall, room 308, in a locked cabinet in the office of Christy O'Connell-Black, Dance Education MA co-coordinator. All notes will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. Participation is not required in order to take part in the dance class or to receive full credit for the course. If you and your child decide not to participate in this study, your decision will be respected and will not affect your child's grade in this course. If you decide to allow your child to take part, you are free to withdraw your child at any time.

**If you have questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Katie Stein. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me with the information listed above. Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you for assisting me in my research.

Sincerely,

*Katie Stein*



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
PARENT/GUARDIAN

**Thesis Title:** *Using Self-compassionate Focused Writing Prompts by Middle School Students in the Dance Classroom: Shaping How Students Respond to their Art and View Themselves as Artists.*

**Researcher:** Katie Stein, Graduate Student at the University of Northern Colorado

**Contact Information:** kstein@a.....org

**Research Advisor:** Dr. Sandra Minton, University of Northern Colorado, [sandra.minton@unco.edu](mailto:sandra.minton@unco.edu)

Participation is voluntary. Your child may decide not to participate in this study and if your child begins participation you or your child may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you and your child are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like your child to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future references. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Child's Full Name (please print)    Child's Birth Date (month/day/year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Parent/Guardian's Signature    Date (month/day/year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Researcher's Signature    Date (month/day/year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Printed Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent    Date (month/day/year)

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on (date).*



ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
STUDENT

**Thesis Title:** *Using Self-compassionate Focused Writing Prompts by Middle School Students in the Dance Classroom: Shaping How Students Respond to their Art and View Themselves as Artists.*

**Researcher:** Katie Stein, Graduate Student at the University of Northern Colorado

**Contact Information:** kstein@a.....org

**Research Advisor:** Dr. Sandra Minton, University of Northern Colorado,  
[sandra.minton@unco.edu](mailto:sandra.minton@unco.edu)

You are being asked to take part in a research study of the effectiveness of using self-compassionate reflection techniques when writing about dance. I am asking you to take part because you are signed up for a dance class at School. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The aim of this research is to discover answers to several research questions: (1) To what extent can self-compassionate and other mindfulness practices benefit dance students? (2) To what extent will the self-compassionate journal prompts affect the way students view their art and themselves as artists? (3) To what extent can self-compassionate practices help students to prepare for a dance performance? (4) Which self-compassionate and mindfulness practices are most beneficial to students and best suited for the arts, in this case dance? (5) What changes occurred in the students' level of self-compassion between the beginning of the class and its end. As part of the graduate thesis project, the research will assist the researcher and future readers of the final thesis in understanding the benefits of using self-compassionate focused journal prompts when reflecting on artistic work.

**Risks:** The risks and discomforts inherent in this study are no greater than those normally encountered during regular dance class participation. If you participate, you agree to take responsibility for all risks involved, and the teacher, university and the School are not liable.

Page 1 of 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Student's initials here)

**Your answers will be confidential.** Every effort will be made to protect your identity. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. A code system will be used to identify all participant responses including responses to the pre-survey, journal prompts, post survey, and interview questions. Interviews with each student will take place midway and at the end of the semester to ask questions about the project and to clarify responses submitted in the students' journal writing. Each interview should last approximately 10-15 minutes and will be conducted during class time. No actual names will be used. I will use pseudonyms. The goal of the research is to simply document the success of using journal prompts that are focused on promoting self-compassion. All documents pertaining to this study will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Annex Building on the campus of the School. All digital student responses will be password protected. All consent forms will be stored in Crabbe Hall, room 308, the office of Christy O'Connell-Black, Dance Education MA co-coordinator. All notes will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. Participation is not required in order to take part in the dance class or to receive full credit for the course. Your decision will be respected and will not result in affecting your grade in this course. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time. If your parent or guardian has given their permission for you to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

**If you have questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Katie Stein. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me with the information listed above. Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you for assisting me in my research.

Sincerely,





ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
STUDENT

**Thesis Title:** Using Self-compassionate Focused Writing Prompts by Middle School Students in the Dance Classroom: Shaping How Students Respond to their Art and View Themselves as Artists.

**Researcher:** Katie Stein, Graduate Student at the University of Northern Colorado

**Contact Information:** kstein@a.....org

**Research Advisor:** Dr. Sandra Minton, University of Northern Colorado, [sandra.minton@unco.edu](mailto:sandra.minton@unco.edu)

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if after you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in a loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future references. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Full Name (please print)      Participant's Birth Date (month/day/year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant's Signature      Date (month/day/year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Researcher's Signature      Date (month/day/year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Printed Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent      Date (month/day/year)

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on (date).*

APPENDIX B  
RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

## Research Instrument #1: Self-Compassion Pre and Post Survey

Student Code \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Students will complete this survey that was created by Dr. Kristin Neff at the beginning of the study and again at the end of the study to measure any changes in self-compassion. It will be taken on-line at <https://self-compassion.org/test-how-self-compassionate-you-are/> during class on each student's own laptop.

At the end of the survey, the website calculates a score and provides a brief narrative about the participant's levels of self-compassion. This score and narrative will be given directly to the researcher and the results will be kept confidential.

For each question, a student may choose an answer from the following responses:

Almost Never - 1

Occasionally - 2

About half of the time - 3

Fairly often - 4

Almost Always - 5

1. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.
2. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.
3. When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through.
4. When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world.
5. I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain.
6. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.
7. When I'm down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.
8. When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself.
9. When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance.
10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.
11. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.
12. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.
13. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.
14. When something painful happens, I try to take a balanced view of the situation.
15. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.



16. When I see aspects of myself that I don't like, I get down on myself.
17. When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective.
18. When I'm really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it.
19. I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering.
20. When something upsets me, I get carried away with my feelings.
21. I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering.
22. When I'm feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.
23. I'm tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies.
24. When something painful happens, I tend to blow the incident out of proportion.
25. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.
26. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

## Research Instrument #2: Journal Prompts:

1. The following prompts will be given to students during the first 3-4 weeks of the semester.

### **Journal Prompt #1:**

Complete the sentence to describe how you view yourself as a dancer:

“As a Dancer, I am...” – (Note: This is the first reflection that students will put on their home pages of their Google Site dance website. At the end of the semester, students will revisit this statement and write a new one. They will reflect on what they changed about their self-assessment or what remained the same.)

### **Journal Prompt #2:**

What does your inner critic say to you when you mess up or make a mistake? Write down the words or phrases that you sometimes say to yourself when you make a mistake.

### **Journal Prompt #3: (this can be given several times throughout the semester as a way to set an intention for rehearsing and choreographing. Multiple entries will be recorded for each student)**

The kindest thing I can do for myself in dance class today is ...

### **Journal Prompt #4: (similar to #3, this prompt can be given several times to observe patterns or changes)**

How would I like to feel today in dance class/at this rehearsal/during the performance?

What is one thing that I can do to help me feel this way? What's one small step I can take to cultivate this feeling?

### **Journal Prompt #5: (prompt can be given multiple times to reinforce the idea of looking for positive events)**

Describe three good things that happened in class today while you were creating your choreography.

Other versions would include:

Describe three good things that happened in

... your rehearsal

....your performance

2. The following prompts will be given to students as they prepare for a performance of their work during weeks 4-10 of the semester

**Journal prompt #6:**

Identify an aspect of choreographing your dance, practicing, or working with others in your group that is challenging or that is bringing up negative feelings. Imagine that you have a very close friend who is dealing with the same issue. What would you say to that friend who is struggling with the same issue as you are? Write the words that you would say to a good friend who is struggling with the same thing you are about the process of creating a dance.

Now, write these same words to yourself. For example, in the above journal entry you may have said, "It's okay that you made a mistake when rehearsing, because no one noticed and the movements you've created are beautiful." Write the words here knowing that you deserve the same kindness as you have already shown your friend.

What was it like for you to do this exercise? What was it like to say kind words to a friend about his or her dance? What was it like to say these words to yourself?

**Journal Prompt #7:**

Think about a time when you have had to prepare for a performance or a presentation.

- o What type of language do you use with yourself to help you prepare? (Can you write a sample sentence?)

Now think about a time just after the performance or presentation.

- o What type of language do you use with yourself when you notice a mistake or a flaw in your performance? Do you use kind words, or do you criticize yourself for making the mistakes?
- o How does the language you use when you talk to yourself, help you prepare for the next performance or presentation?

**Journal Prompt #8:**

Letter Writing (Neff, *Self-compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind To Yourself* p.16).

- o Think about the rehearsal you just had and how you are preparing your dance for performance:
  - What are some of the feelings that you have toward the dance itself?
  - What are some of the feelings that you have about the performance?
  - Are there any aspects that you feel are inadequate, flawed, or challenging?
  - How do you view your role in creating the choreography or how prepared you are for a performance?
  - How do you view yourself right now as a dancer? (you can always go back to the phrase "As a dancer, I am...")
- o Now think about an imaginary friend who loves you no matter what, who is accepting, kind, and compassionate. This friend can see all of your

strengths and also all of your weaknesses, including the feelings that you just described in your journal. This friend loves you and accepts you for who you are.

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend focusing on the feelings you just described in your journal. What would this friend say about the flaws you described? What would this friend say about any of the negative feelings or judgments you may have about yourself? How might this friend express support and encouragement for your work?

As you write the letter, try to demonstrate as much kindness, caring, and compassion for you and your work.

### **Journal Prompt #9:**

#### **Rehearsal Review**

- Take a moment to review today's rehearsals (or this week's rehearsals). Write down anything that you felt bad about, anything you may have judged yourself or another person in your group for, or any part of the rehearsal that was challenging or may have made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or embarrassed. Please record your answers in the grid below.

Describe an event or moment from the rehearsal	How does this make you feel?	Write about the event reassuring yourself with words of understanding and comfort.

3. The following prompt would be given to students in the two weeks prior to a performance when the dances have been completed and tech rehearsals are taking place:

### **Journal Prompt #10:**

Today you will create a compassionate performance mantra for when you are feeling stressed that you will say to yourself before a performance. This should only be 3 statements long and something that is easy for you to memorize. Try using the format below if you are stuck.

Example mantra:

1st Sentence: Identify the way you are feeling	I am feeling scared that I will make a mistake.
2nd Sentence: Remind yourself that these feelings are normal	This is how others are feeling too.
3rd Sentence: Set your intention to be self-compassionate and give yourself positive reinforcement.	I will breathe and do my best and enjoy sharing my work with others.

(During the warm-up prior to a performance, students would be asked to pause and say their performance mantras silently to themselves). After you have performed, how did reciting the mantra help you to feel? Less stressed? No change?

The following prompts would be given to students after a performance and as they watch the video of their performance together as a class:

**Journal Prompt #11**

Describe three good things that happened in your performance.

Can you imagine making this practice of finding three good things a part of your daily routine? Could you apply this practice to other subjects at school or areas of your life? Why or why not?

**Journal Prompt #12:**

Complete the sentence that best describes who you are as a dancer.

“As a dancer, I am...”

What do you notice about how you describe yourself? Has your description changed or stayed the same since you wrote about the first time? Why do you think it has changed or stayed the same?

## Research Instrument #3: Student Exit Interview Questions

Code \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

- How would you describe self-compassion to a friend who did not take this class?
- What have you learned about self-compassion or techniques for being more self-compassionate?
- Were you able to connect self-compassion techniques or skills to other arts classes? If so, describe what you have applied and how this has helped you in other areas besides dance?
- What were your biggest challenges with applying the self-compassion techniques?
- Based on your experience of viewing your work throughout the dance making process, were there benefits to viewing your work with focused self-compassion?
- How well did the self-compassionate journals and activities help you to reduce anxiety or stress over performing or when watching the video of your performance?
- Comparing your “As a dancer, I am...” journal response from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester, how has your view of yourself as a dancer changed or remained the same as a result of this class?
- Of the self-compassion techniques that we used in class as part of the journaling process, which one(s) were most helpful to you? Which one(s) were least helpful? Explain why.
- Did the journal exercises where you wrote from the point of view of a friend who was showing compassion, help you to feel more compassionate toward yourself?

## Research Instrument #4: Performance Pre and Post Survey

Student Code \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you view performing for your peers or performing for an audience an unpleasant or stressful experience? (rate on a scale of 1-5) Circle **one** number for your answer.

1= not at all      2= slightly      3= moderately      4= very      5= extremely

2. Do you view watching your performance on a video an unpleasant or stressful experience?

(rate on a scale of 1-5) Circle **one** number for your answer.

1= not at all      2= slightly      3= moderately      4= very      5= extremely

3. Use the 5-point scale to rate the degree to which you feel **all of** the following emotions with

regard to performing, presenting work to your peers, or how you might feel if you made a mistake when performing. (**place a number next to each one of the emotions**)

1= not at all      2= slightly      3= moderately      4= very      5= extremely

\_\_\_\_\_ Sad

\_\_\_\_\_ Hostile

\_\_\_\_\_ Dejected

\_\_\_\_\_ Mad

\_\_\_\_\_ Down

\_\_\_\_\_ Embarrassed

\_\_\_\_\_ Depressed

\_\_\_\_\_ Humiliated

\_\_\_\_\_ Nervous

\_\_\_\_\_ Disgraced

\_\_\_\_\_ Tense

\_\_\_\_\_ Ashamed

\_\_\_\_\_ Worried

\_\_\_\_\_ Incompetent

\_\_\_\_\_ Anxious

\_\_\_\_\_ Worthless

\_\_\_\_\_ Irritated

\_\_\_\_\_ Stupid

\_\_\_\_\_ Angry

\_\_\_\_\_ Self-conscious

4. Imagine yourself in the following situation: You are performing your dance on the stage in the theatre and you forget your part. The other dancers in your group stop and look at you waiting for you to make the next movement so that the dance can continue. You are completely blank and don't know what to do. You can hear the students in the audience whispering about your mistake. Eventually you resume dancing and finish the performance.

If you found yourself in this situation, how likely would you be to think **each** of the following thoughts? (**place a number next to each one of the statements**)

1= not at all    2= slightly    3= moderately    4= very    5= extremely

- a.     \_\_\_\_\_ This is awful!
- b.     \_\_\_\_\_ Everybody goofs up now and then
- c.     \_\_\_\_\_ In the long run, this really doesn't matter
- d.     \_\_\_\_\_ I am such a loser
- e.     \_\_\_\_\_ I wish I could die
- f.     \_\_\_\_\_ This is sort of funny
- g.     \_\_\_\_\_ I should have expected this would happen



## APPENDIX C

## TASK SHEET FOR UNIT OF STUDY

## Dance in Martial Arts Task Sheet

### Dance 7/8

### Spring 2019



Our Statement of Inquiry: *Dancers can transform movement and explore the boundaries between martial arts and dance to tell a story.*

For this unit you will demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of B.E.S.T. - body, energy, space, and time, and how dancers use those elements to create specific movements. But those elements are not only found in dance, but also in a wide range of other movement related activities - such as martial arts.

For the summative assessment, you will create a dance that is *inspired* by *unarmed* (no weapons) martial arts. This means that we are not simply recreating fight scenes, but using perhaps the sharp and sudden movements found in karate or the smooth and fluid movements found in Tai Chi as inspiration for original dance pieces. Be sure to follow the guidelines for creating your dance:

- Research at least two martial arts of your group's choice. (Follow the research guidelines below to help you gather details)
- It should be a minimum of three minutes
- Include movements from all four categories of B.E.S.T, **with emphasis on Energy and the Space.**
- Have a clear artistic intention or story you wish to tell the audience that is communicated through movement rather than literal mime
- Music that is instrumental

Martial Arts Choices:

As a group, decide on at least two martial arts (preferably one that is familiar and one that is unfamiliar) that you would like to use as inspiration for your dance. Choose from the list below:

Taekwondo (Korea)	Karate (Japan)	Tai Chi (China)	Coreeda (Australia)
Kung Fu (China)	Aikido (Japan)	Juego de maní (Cuba)	Engolog or N'golo (Angola)